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The Scholar of Bygate

A Tale

BY

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Author of "A Moorland Idyl," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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THE SCHOLAR OF BYGATE

CHAPTER I.

JENNIPER.

“ HA'D away, hinny ! ” cried the busy woman again and louder, as she paused to look up, with her hands in the steaming soap-suds over which she leant. “ I'll no hear it, I tell ye. Ye'se but a daft kittie to read sic words to ony lugs but thae of a whin buss.”

“ That's a' nonsense, Maggie. Canna you see that it's no for love he's writing ? ”

The girl spoke severely, with her eycs upon the paper from which she read.

“ No for love ! Then what for does a callant like yon want to see ye cfter dark in a place sac

lonesome and ghaist-like? Dinna ta'k to me o' help. Do ye mind, lassie, that ye're bonnie?"

"Bonnie!" The girl seemed to scorn the fact—compliment from such lips it could hardly be. "What has that to do in the matter?"

"Just a' to dee wi' it. I'll no trust 'em. Every yen o' them's a scoondrel in his heart, and yon mair nor maist. Ha'd away, now, and dinna fash yoursel' wi' the like o' him."

"I'll gan."

"Ye winna gan." The woman stripped the soap froth from each arm swiftly, and came forward. "No, Jenniper, ye winna gan."

An angry frown ruffled the girl's forehead as she drew a step back. It was but momentary, and she laughed.

"What are ye feared on, woman?"

"Ye ken nicely, hinny. It's no safe, to speak naething o' seemly, for a bonnie lass to gae trysting wi' a' the waffie loons that ask her,"

"Have I ever trysted wi' yane?" fired the girl immediately.

"I winna say that ye hae, and ye'll no begin wi' the like o' yon."

"I carena what he is. His words sound true, and if I can gie help to onybody I'll gie it, the sooner if a' other folk ha'd aby o' him."

The girl's face was turned away as she spoke, for she was angry with her matter-of-fact confidant for so steadily refusing the advice required of her. Commonplace scruples thrust upon her by another went far towards extinguishing them in Jenniper herself, and even towards bringing forward their bolder opposite, at which, perhaps, the girl had hitherto but barely glanced. In the younger features you could see antagonism each moment growing, and very expressive features did the process make them. Moorland breeze and sunbeam had evidently been at their moulding, if also the storm-cloud and the mist had not been absent.

They afforded a strong contrast to the uniformly grey rigour of the masculine face opposed to them.

“Yon’s good enough words, hinny,” said the elder dryly; “but ye’se no apply them here. Are ye wiser, then, than a’ your neighbours? And if ye hae your mind made up, what for did ye come the gate to Maggie?”

“Because I thought ye had mair sense than ye hae shown to me the now,” was the prompt rejoinder.

“What for should he come to *ye* for help?” demanded Maggie, evading the personal tendency of the disagreement, and really concerned on her companion’s account. “Are there nae lads nor men, nor even an old lass like me, to help him at a pinch, think ye? The bonnie face and the saft white skin are mair needful to kittle enterprises likely? Oh, Jenniper, my lass, just burn the bit letter, and gie nae mair thought about it.”

"And what would I feel myself? . . . Just a thowless coward," said the other scornfully.
"That's no my opinion of Jennifer Curle."

Maggie had turned as though to resume her washing, and in the momentary pause the twitter of a bird came through the open doorway from a gorse bush on the hill-slope outside. The girl's eyes travelled in that direction, and she seemed about to follow them, when Maggie was again at her side.

"Promise me, lass, that ye'll no gang the night," said the woman with more solemnity than she had yet assumed, emotional appeal having taken the place of argument in her tone.

"I canna promise; but I'll think," returned the other, fixing her eyes suddenly upon the gaze that held her, and showing the first sign of even the smallest concession in her manner.

"Ye must know that I hae good cause for what I say, hinny," continued the elder in the same

earnest tone. "I ken mair o' that kin than onybody else i' the country-side, and I'm no just the fool ye think me."

Although the hint was not without its effect upon Jenniper, she turned it off lightly.

"But I'm no skeigh on 'em, Maggie, for a' that," laughed she. "If my arm is soft and white, as ye cast up to me, it's no made o' feather."

The girl clutched her companion's brown and muscular arm as she said it, and bared her own fair limb almost to the socket. It shone like the trim and new-wrought blade beside the used and rusted, but as trusty steel was in it. The elder's face relaxed at the contrast, and she smiled grimly.

"Ay, ay, it's weel, my lass, but it 'ull no stand ye beside yon."

"Will it no?" The girl's fingers tightened, and Maggie winced. "He'll no be the first that has felt the weight on't."

The woman was proud of her in her heart, but she wouldn't show it.

"Ye'se tarr'ble het, lass, and shairp, and no just badly named," was all she said, as Jenniper allowed her to return to the steaming tub.

The girl watched her for a minute or two longer in silence, but Maggie made no further effort to persuade her. The latter had noticed the effect of her last appeal, and could but trust to its working; for if headstrong, she knew Jennie was "no hallock,"—would not act, that is, like the average flighty specimen of her sex. Hearing a movement, Maggie looked up and gave the parting nod which the other invited. But the woman's face retained its severe expression as she bent to her solitary work.

Outside the lonely cottage were the hills of bent and heather intermingled, enclosing a wide dale which the golden sun of middle autumn now illumined. Some scattered distant houses alone

were visible, with their few sheltering trees, the last village being more than a mile off down the road which could be seen winding its open way from the bare fells in the west, behind which Scotland lay. Jenniper did not seek this road, but struck away over the grass in a slanting but upward direction, her face sobered by thought. Maggie's decisive attitude had undoubtedly impressed her. If she had come to the consultation in half a spirit of jocularity, she had left it in quite a different temper.

Presently she reached a crease in the hill-side in which the top waters of a burn gathered to run down to the river in the vale below. It necessitated a jump, and in Jenniper's present mood she did not instinctively take it. Instead, she sat down on the bank, and threw a thoughtful eye on the water before her.

Such was 'not the girl's way, and perhaps she was conscious of the unfamiliar posture. The

springs of life were sound in her, therefore unsuspected, unexamined. Her natural tendency rather was to the pointed and impulsive than to the smooth and the restrained. Early in childhood had her piquant characteristics revealed themselves, and earned for her the fanciful name now invariably adopted. To a waggish and discerning grandfather was she indebted for it, as also no doubt for much else of a less determinate kind. Several of her elders had perceived in her flashes of that departed wit from whose tongue most of the dale's later merriment, if also of its censure and even scandal, was reputed to have issued. The little girl, almost from her cradle, had shown a mischievous delight in putting her word in playful rivalry against this oracle, an attitude which the elder showed no less a readiness in fostering proudly. Thus passages arose between them which delighted the curious, culminating in Jennie's historical victory when she was ten years old, under

the very eye of the dale. It was in the juniper season, and a group, returning from the Harthope Knowe with their baskets of berries (or “jennipers,” as they called them), for savouring the whisky, had paused before old Ephraim’s door to enjoy the joke which had been seen in his eye from a distance as he stood leaning on his ash stick to receive them. It was, however, only upon his grand-daughter that his gaze now rested, as she came along with the laden basket on her arm.

“ Ye’ll hae got your sins in that tarr’ble heavy basket, daur say, my lassie,” remarked the old man.

“ But it’s not sae heavy,” said she.

“ Then it’ll be a’ that’s gude o’ ye likely,” returned he.

The child shook her head.

“ It’s just a’ the gude words that *ye* hae spoken o’ your neebors in a’ your lang, lang life, and ye canna tell even them frae jennipers. Look !”

“ Ha’d away, ye little bizzum ! Ye’re just for

a' the warld a jennifer your ain sel'," was the delighted retort.

This was ten years ago, but the name had clung to her.

From the water the girl's eyes travelled to the distant hill tops, from behind which the crests of clouds were peeping, all the rest of the sky being without a speck. As she looked, a movement in the air drew her glance, and she watched a heron come sailing down the valley in majestic flight. Thought, not reverie, had marked her face before, but the bird evidently gave her mind a fresh direction, and for a time she followed it. This, however, was rudely interrupted, and she leapt up. The report of a gun had suddenly snapt the silence of the valley, and that stately progress of the heron had become an uncontrolled and shapeless drop to the earth, over which it had skimmed so proudly.

The girl's face had changed to that of Medusa. The snake-like radiance of hatred and anger flashed from her eyes, as she turned them in fiery scrutiny on the little cloud of smoke which the clear air was rapidly dispersing. Distant though its object, her gaze apparently satisfied her.

"A thousand curses on your arm, ye wretch!" cried she, flinging her shrill voice to the far-off unsuspecting sportsman. "Ye promised that ye'd never do it. . . . A man's promise!"

Jennifer's angry scorn seemed in her last utterance to spread to the whole range of perfidious man, and by no means to stop at the wanton destroyer of herons alone. She did not sit down again. A visible agitation possessed her, and as she tried to give some muscular outlet to her feelings, her fingers crushed up the paper which she had not put from her hand since leaving Maggie, and it was flung into the stream. The action seemed to recall her, and darting to the edge, she

recaptured the floating letter as it came to the bank. Then she opened and re-read it.

"Will you come down to the Howff to-morrow evening at nightfall?" so the words ran, written in a bold, educated hand. "I do not say anything here to explain the request, or to beg you to grant it, beyond the fact that you can be of service to a fellow-creature. That, I believe, will be enough for *you*. The fellow-creature is not 'The Scholar of Bygate.'"

In contemplating the words once more, anger faded from her eyes, and, clearing the water at one resolute bound, she strode onwards over the bent.

Beyond another ridge, in a wider tributary crease, was Jenniper's home — a white-washed shepherd's house known as Angryhaugh, where her father and mother dwelt. The ducks and geese and fowls, which were spread over the sunlit green before the door, seemed to greet the girl's return, and at the sound her mother looked out.

"Now, Jennie my lass, come awa' to the wark," said the active woman, turning in again, and the daughter at once set a ready hand to her duties.

Actively engaged though she was for the remainder of the day, her mind continued busy. Maggie's attitude had surprised as well as impressed Jenniper. Of course the family of Bygate was a familiar possession of the dale, and there had always been a certain amount of mystery in the popular estimation of it, but this had never greatly affected the clear-sighted girl at Angry-haugh. Perhaps her imagination was less deeply pledged to a stereotyped form of character than was the case with her general neighbours, so that any divergence from such type would be less incomprehensible in her eyes. Here again it would be difficult to say how far her grandfather's irony had aided her. An incisive remark of his had shot a ray of sunlight (or a lightning flash) into many an obscure appearance for duller visions than that

of Jenniper had ever been. But, from whatever cause, this girl had never found any particular difficulty in construing all experience, whether personal or by report, that she had hitherto had of the Croziers of Bygate, and her interpretation had never prompted anything like fear. And certainly she had never expected that it would be Maggie Laidler, of all persons, who was to be the first to bring her even within hail of such a feeling. Rigid as Maggie was, Jennie had hitherto implicitly trusted her intelligence. Thus it was that the girl thought more of her elder's foolish attitude than the point involved warranted in her eyes.

Her father came in from the hills to his mid-day meal; a silent, meditative man, whose natural current of speculation was confined to the hard grey banks of theology and sheep. But within his own channel he was vigorous and clear as any mountain burn. The three of them seated at the table, speechless for the most part, presented a sugges-

tive picture to any interested in the human face. In mere feature, Jennifer bore more resemblance to her mother than to the harder grey-eyed man; but, in common phrase, she was not quite the child of either, a fact, perhaps, of which she had grown aware. In her world, what is known as the mutual confidence of families does not exist. Strong affection (although undisplayed, perhaps, from the cradle to the grave) there is; but for the rest, mere unquestioned authority and subordination regulate domestic ties. In this particular case, since absolute infancy not even the latter had found any obvious place. The daughter's early maturity of character was no doubt mainly the cause of this. She had never claimed, but had simply fallen, into her independent position in the family group, than which no fact could more plainly indicate the level of intelligence upon which the Angryhaugh household stood. Its only other member, a young man, had for some years been launched upon the general world.

"I saw Oliver Hislop the day," remarked the shepherd bluntly, breaking a period of silence, but not looking up. "Will ye hae him along to the house here, Jen?"

"With his gun likely?" said Jenniper, affecting indifference, although her colour slightly deepened.

"Ay, ay."

"It's no for me that he shall come here," added the girl with emphasis, to which the father nodded, and the mother added a distinct murmur of approval. But here it ended, and the meal was finished mainly in silence as before.

These few words, however, trivial as they seemed, were not without their effect upon Jenniper. It added, if that could be, to her anger against Oliver Hislop, the wanton exterminator of herons, the man of faithless word. That he should thus, after the passage between them, try to fortify his position by gaining her father's ear seemed positively insulting to the girl. For one thing, it

showed infallibly his crass misconstruction of her character, and it wounded Jennie's pride that so obtuse a creature should have dared to encompass her. But this only indirectly concerned her now, by way, that is, of awakening her energies in another direction. This meeting with Crozier, if she kept it, would re-assert her intellectual dignity. Even if there were a spice of imprudence in it, why, so much the better. It would all the more effectually put her beyond the range of these ordinary commonplace mortals against which she felt this momentary wrath. The Scholar had at least granted her intelligence by so directly challenging it, whatever his ulterior schemes. If only to confirm this fact, she would go. What pure love of adventure had so strongly urged in her, pique completed, and late afternoon found Jennifer resolved.

By the best of chances, her father was going down the dale to a meeting of his church. In the early twilight he set off, just as the girl came in

with the can from milking the cow, and for a moment she paused to watch the departing figure, with the folded check plaid coiled round him from one shoulder; the stooping gait; the long, deliberate stride, with which the stick drawn along the ground kept step; and at the heel the inseparable collie. It faded in the dusk, and Jenniper went in.

“Light the lamp, hinny, and I’ll set the milk,” said the mother, taking the can from the girl’s hand in the doorway, for she also had been throwing a glance after her goodman down the slope.

“Ay, ay, mother.”

This also chanced to suit the daughter well. She seemed a minute or two in finding the matches, but that was not all she did. A drawer had been opened, and from it Jenniper had taken something. Hearing her mother busy still, she lit a candle, and then it could be seen that there was a pistol in her hand, the magnified shadow of

which was thrown on the wall. For another minute or two there were slight clicking sounds, audible only to the causer of them. The drawer was closed; the girl unhooked the front of her gown and thrust the weapon in and secured it there. When this preparation was completed, she burst into song, oddly enough from such lips, and after such employment, into a sentimental ditty, to the air, “Clean Pease Strae.”

“When John and me were married,
Our hadding was but sma’,
For my minnie, cankered carlin,
Would gie us nought ava’.”

“I’m right glad o’ your mind about yon, Jen,” said the mother, as she came into the room.

“Ou ay, mother,” was the jocular response, and Jenniper turned the subject of the conversation.

Despite the remoteness of their situation, there was nothing extraordinary in Jenniper’s going out

at night; none the less was she glad upon this occasion that it was only her mother to whom she had to announce her intention. She did it in an easy, candid way, aware that no interrogation would be put to her on the subject. So indeed it proved. She hummed an air later as she put some things on, and also as she went out.

“No, no, mother, I’ll no be long,” she called out from the door, and the mother pondered by the hearth alone.

CHAPTER II.

A T T H E H O W F F .

THE day had clouded during the afternoon, and it was now dark. As Jenniper went out she heard the wind rising, the sound of it coming to her like an eerie sough from the obscure heights around. A measure of light, diffused over the thick clouds in the south-east, showed where the moon was rising behind them.

It was not the tremor of fear that was in the girl's fingers as she closed the door after her. Ignorant of any self-distrust, whether by night or day, she went to an enterprise like this merely with a flutter of expectation. We have seen that love of adventure rather than of sentiment had decided her, and such interpretation of the strange

summons as she had urged upon her sole confidant, Maggie Laidler, was her own sincere conviction. She just felt once again in her bosom to know that her protector was secure, and then set off to the place of meeting.

The spot appointed was an old burial-ground, just a quadrangular bit of hill-side walled-in, and no doubt, in times past, adequately consecrated to the solemn purposes of a long home, although far removed from any sacred building. This isolation and severance from the hint of human shelter which such an edifice affords, invested the place with an excessive solemnity where all nature inspired a sense of awe. The Howff, therefore, had acquired more than its normal share of shadowy lore in the minds of a gloomy but imaginative people. Here whaups, corbies, and far more uncanny things were reputed to foregather, and late though her day, Jenniper knew that no rational neighbour would think of willingly disturbing such

sinister conclave after the evening sun had cast the shadow of Carter Fell upon the scene. But superstitious fears had as little power against her own soul as the more worldly and determinate ones, an intrepidity perhaps not wholly unconnected with the fact that the girl's grandfather had herded that territory, and, consequently, that she herself had haunted it, both in his company and alone, at most hours of the day and night, in fair weather and in foul.

There was nothing at all unfavourable in the present conditions. A minute or two was enough to familiarise the eye with the obscurity, and to Jenniper, of course, every yard of the ground was known. The water kept up its ceaseless murmur to the night, and the girl for some distance kept to its bank, avoiding only a jutting boulder, a stunted alder or birch, which now and then came in her path. When the land opened to the main dale, she turned over to the right and had a

"dike" (a moorland wall) to climb. Having found a secure crevice for her toe, she raised herself, and with a hand on the top stone simply vaulted over. As she alighted on the other side she paused.

Remote lights twinkled from two or three distant points, marking known abodes, Bygate amongst the number. One, evidently, clear and unenclosed, seemed to Jenniper but a few yards away. She, however, knew the delusive effect of an open light in the dark, and therefore, that this one might be half a mile away. Still, as it was in the exact direction that she must take, it engaged her attention. The ray, so distinct was it, amazed and confused her eye, until a moment's reflection decided her to make directly for it. The Howff was but a quarter of a mile from here, and whether on this side of it or beyond, the girl felt that the light marked the straight path to it. So she set off.

As she advanced, Jenniper observed that the

light for an instant went out, as it seemed, at regular intervals. After pondering the fact in her prompt, decisive way, she could but conclude that some object was on these occasions deliberately placed before it. It flashed upon her that a person walking to and fro would bring about this effect, if between her eye and the light. Was it he? And had he so arranged it as to give her reassurance in the mysterious enterprise? It was credible, and the thought undoubtedly impressed her in his favour.

Further progress confirmed the girl's surmise. Whilst still some fifty yards away she could discern enough to convince her that the light (from a bull's-eye lantern, probably, so piercing was the ray), must have been placed upon the very wall of the Howff, and that the Scholar had set himself to pace before it. Nearer still, and she could distinguish the features, purposely held that the light should illumine them. But now Jenniper too was

in the ray, and he must have seen her, for the figure stood still, and a voice came proclaiming who it was.

The girl stepped boldly forward, and the pistol, now clutched in her hand, was visible in the light. The man's eye fell upon it, and he gave a little laugh.

"You have come prepared," he said, by way of greeting.

"Did you wish me to come unprepared?" asked she.

"By no means; I admire your pluck. Nobody else in the dale would have accepted the invitation even on those terms."

"And what is the purpose of the invitation?" asked Jennifer, taking her stand four or five yards away, out of the shaft of light. A corresponding movement of his made her require that he should stay within it.

"Yes, you have a right to demand that," said he, resuming his former place. "Also to know the

reason why I have brought you here at such a strange hour. You, my lass, don't know what it is to have no soul in the whole world to whom you can speak in friendship, or else you would understand my behaviour better. It is not delightful to have friends amongst the shades only,—shades that only talk to you in echoes of your own voice. However glorious and however endless their thoughts, wouldn't you weary of them? Wouldn't you sicken of the sound of nothing but your own voice?"

"Likely enough I would. . . . But is it books that you mean by shades, or the real ghosts that folks say there are at Bygate?"

Jenniper, who, from her screen of darkness, had kept her eyes intently fixed upon the man's serious countenance, saw the smile he gave.

"*You* don't need an answer to that," said he, "or you wouldn't be talking here to me now. Let them be ghosts if you like to think it. Don't you

hear them amongst the graves here behind us, and in that wind that is beginning to play around the cairns? I hear ghosts every night of my life, every day, too, for the matter of that. Isn't the world made up of ghosts quite as much as of hard-headed mortals? Thank Heaven, far more so, or else it would be an intolerable place to dwell in. But I didn't ask you here to talk about ghosts only. I wanted a word with a human soul about things that are human, and that is the sole explanation of my boldness. Nobody in the dale but yourself would have given me it,—nay, would have been capable of giving me it. Though you feel me to be a stranger, you see that the shades have told me something of you, and they have told me truly."

"But have they told you that it was seemly o' me to be holding a tryst after nightfall with a man that is no kin to me?"

"Most assuredly they have," returned the other

vehemently, walking to and fro in the light. "Leave such language to those that it belongs to. If they had lied to me in saying so, would you have been here to support them? Are you not a woman, and does the light of heaven go out with nightfall? Doesn't it rather break itself up into a million fragments, and scatter the firmament with its innumerable sparks? Do you think that your womanhood is not a million times more sacred to me by night than by day? But, of course, you canna know it. I am a man, and it is your right to suspect me. But, even at the pistol's mouth, let us recognise once for all that we meet as reasonable mortals, and not as fools, to whom the position of the sun is the guide to their morals."

The youth spoke with all the energy and volubility of a tongue unloosed which is habitually silent, and now consequently untrained in the common restraints of conversation. His imaginative, almost theatrical glow, took Jenniper so com-

pletely by surprise that she was not sure how far she understood him. Report had been wholly ignorant of this quality in the man, however eloquent of others.

"Will you grant me that?" he asked, in face of her inevitable silence.

"What, that I'll be a friend to ye?"

"That's ower much to start wi', daur say," said he, falling into her vernacular intonation. "But, at least, that ye'll no take me for a scoundrel, nor yourself for a fool."

"Ay, ay, I'll grant you that," smiled Jenniper boldly, in spite of her friend Maggie's words, which were ringing in her ears.

"So far good. Now to my purpose; for, as I said before, I did not get you here to talk of ghosts and stars merely, nor of such tragical matters as you evidently came prepared for," he went on smiling. "You almost tempt me to play the ruffian, that you may show your powers, and

not be altogether disappointed in your adventure. . . . Yesterday my father brought a girl of about your own age to Bygate ; his niece, my cousin. She is left, it seems, without parent and without home. You pity her, no doubt, for however wild the common notions about Bygate, you are quite right in thinking it not the most delightful abode for a young woman of twenty ; particularly for one not proof against ghosts. My cousin is from Newcastle, and strange to our manners here. Rashly, I have promised to secure her one friend. You are the one. If you decline, I shall not ask another."

"What made you so sure o' me as to promise before you'd got my word ?" said Jenniper, in a tone of half pique.

"I deal in magic, and I saw you agree as you sat by the burn this morning before Hislop shot the heron."

"Then you saw it wrong, for I'll be friend to nobody that I've to come to Bygate to seek."

The girl's face had coloured in the darkness under the knowledge of his far-seeing eye.

"That I also saw, although I should never have thought of asking it," was his calm response. "May she come to you, or, at least, meet you on your side of the water? At any time and any place that you like to mention."

"That would make a difference likely."

"So I thought. Will you name the place, and then I need keep you no longer. Perhaps you'll let me go with you as far as the burn."

"There's no need o' that. If this is all you've got to say to me —" The girl's disappointment was hardly disguised.

"I meant to say much more, but I don't think it would be wise to stay here longer with this light, especially as you see the moon is clearing before the breeze. Perhaps I may some day be fortunate enough to speak with you again, although you need not suspect me, as no doubt you will.

Take the lantern with you." But Jenniper declined.

"Then, where?"

"I cross the bridge as I come from Crawston every Friday afternoon about four."

"To-morrow is Friday. May she come?"

"I shall be passing."

At a click the lantern was darkened, and Jenniper felt just one thrill of alarm. Crozier might have read it, for immediately the light flashed forth again.

"Do you trust me without the light?" he asked ironically.

"Certainly; I can defend myself," was the bold rejoinder.

"Then, good-night."

"Good-night."

The wind alone again sighed around the Howff, not even the footsteps departing in opposite directions being audible. Jenniper heard a restless plover calling from the slope, and she looked up to the

broken sky where the moon had just been again hidden by a sailing cloud. She threw a glance all around her, clutched her weapon, and strode forward. Her mother was still alone when the girl came in to her, singing the refrain with which she had set off some time before.

Crozier, on his part, had plunged down to the bottom of the valley, forded the river in his bare feet for want of a bridge (the only one being more than half a mile lower down), and was now ascending the pastures on the other side, above which, on an elevated terrace where the moor began, Bygate stood.

He was feeling a kind of triumphant satisfaction at his recent interview, for it had confirmed some late speculations of his own. Although withholding himself from social intercourse with his neighbours, he kept a sharp look-out upon the dale, and had formed his own intolerant estimate of every inhabitant within it. To Jenniper Curle alone had his instinct extended the smallest favour, as he now

decided not without cause. The incident had slightly raised his opinion of the race.

Up here the wind was beginning to surge through the trees behind the house, rising into a loud gust, which brought a sycamore leaf against Crozier's face, and then dying away into the merest whisper. He was an intimate of the wind, and gloried in a flying gale which made the fir needles hiss and the branches creak as they jostled their neighbours. He looked up at the crests marked against the breaking sky, and in lowering his eyes encountered a figure running directly towards him. He had but just time to extend his arms, when his cousin fell fainting into them. Crozier burst into a loud laugh.

"Are you bewitched already?" asked he, in a jeering tone.

But the girl fell to weeping violently, and it was some minutes before he could induce her to be led back into the house.

CHAPTER III.

THE ORPHAN.

"SIBBALD," cried a gruff voice from some room adjoining the passage by which the young man was accompanying his cousin to the staircase, "what's become o' yon lass?"

"She's all right," was the brief response, as the youth passed on, feeling the fingers of his companion tighten upon his arm.

With a candle in his hand Crozier took the girl upstairs and led her into a room in which he lit a lamp. There was a fire in the grate, and he bade her be seated in an armchair by the hearth-rug. None the less she stood still in the spot where he had left her, her recent emotion still apparent in her face. As he replaced the lamp-chimney she looked

about her with scared glances at which the man laughed openly.

"Are you afraid of me, too?" he asked, receiving a negative which seemed by no means conclusive, but upon which he acted so far as to turn the key in the door without asking her further approval. As he returned to where she was still standing, he clapped his hands upon her two shoulders and looked into her face.

"Now, Miss Adelina Brett," said he, with an imperiousness which could not be mistaken for harshness, "sit down in that chair, for you have nothing to fear here." Crozier's visit to the Howff had really exhilarated him.

Something in the utterance reached the girl as the most definite approach to kindness she had received since her arrival at Bygate, and with an uneasy glance at the black space of the unscreened windows, she obeyed.

"There isn't a blind to pull down," he said.

"You may put me onc. But who is there to look?"

"That's just it," faltered the girl. "I—I wish there were crowds. I hate the dark to look in at me."

Crozier had his face against the glass looking out, and laughed at her ingenuousness.

"Miles of lonely moor," remarked he, "with nothing but the homeless wind wandering over it. Be thankful, my lass, that you are not out alone in it, as you seemed inclined to be. But look here, Lina—I shall call you Lina with your permission—do you see that little solitary light across there? That is the abode of Jenniper—a point for you to dwell on. Whatever you think we are, *there* is a human being who will befriend you, and one to whom you can speak without fear or reserve. Her opinion of us is pretty much the same as yours, so you need feel no restraint in talking even about your worthy relations. She has given you a meet-

ing-place to which I will conduct you to-morrow, and it will be your own fault if you don't make a friend of her."

She had ventured to the window to look out as he directed, and shrank closely to her stalwart cousin's side as she peered into the hideous expanse of darkness, for the inside light eclipsed the glimmer from the moon which overspread the landscape.

"What kind of a girl is she?" asked Lina, going back shivering to her chair.

"That's no' so easy to answer. You'd better wait and judge for yourself. One thing only I can tell you, which it will be as well to remember, and that is that she'll say what she means, and she'll expect you to do the same. Some people mean one thing and say another—don't try that with Jenniper, not even in the paltriest trifle."

"Why do you think I need that advice?"

"Because most people do, and you are no better than your neighbours."

"And Jenniper is, I suppose."

Human nature outstripped even nervousness for a moment. Sibbald threw one sharp glance at her which she missed, as her eyes were on the fire.

"She has more sense than most," was all his comment. "Now, I want to know what you were running away from."

"I felt so frightened and wretched."

"Wretched you might well feel, poor lass; but what frightened you?"

"Your father."

"In what way?"

"He is so fierce."

"And what made him fierce just at that moment?"

The girl stared into the fire, with her chin in one hand, but gave no answer. Crozier stood up beside her.

"Now I want to know, my lass. And you will find it just as well to be open with me whilst you're here, if only for your own comfort. We're not all ruffians, whatever we may seem to you."

"He'd been talking of things."

"Of your things? Your position, your prospect, and so forth?"

"Yes, and of father's. He was cruel and wicked," exclaimed the girl more impulsively, and with a threatening of tears.

"I wish you would tell me what he said. I shall know better how to befriend you."

"He said that he never ought to have taken me into his house; that my proper place was the workhouse or the jail; that my father was a thief, a liar, and I don't know—what—"

"It was not the proper time to tell you that, whether true or false. But tell me, Adelina, do you know, have you the slightest suspicion of what is the meaning of it all?"

"N—no. It is all false and wicked, and I won't stay here after to-night. My father used to preach sometimes on the Quayside."

"That is quite possible," replied Sibbald dryly. "But however fierce my father may be, he never says anything for which he has no foundation, at any rate in his own mind. I want to know why he is so fierce against your father. Can you tell me?"

"No, there is no reason. It is only because my father was a good man, and *he* is a bad one."

"That is conclusive," said the youth, unable to resist a laugh at the naïve explanation. "But, whatever the quarrel, I don't see that it ought to be carried on against you. Did my father say why your proper place was the workhouse or the jail?"

"No, indeed. He said something about people living honestly; but did I or father ever do any-

thing dishonest, I should like to know? If I ought to be in jail why did he bring me here?"

"Perhaps he thought Bygate was next best to it —some do."

The girl looked up at him with her shining eyes full of alarm at first; but ultimately she gave the watery smile that he invited.

"Do you?" asked she.

"No, I don't. I should never dream of living anywhere else."

"Lor! You seem such a sensible man that I should have thought you would have been sick of living with sheep."

"I have a few other things as well as sheep to live with."

Adelina longed to say Jennipers; but she overcame it, and simply asked what.

"These amongst others," was Crozier's response, as he waved his hand in the direction of the

bookshelves with which the room was amply provided. "You may come in here when you like; but no book is to leave this room, remember. It is an agreement between my father and me, and if it is once broken, I shall lock the door."

"I soon get tired of reading," said Lina, with scant appreciation of the favour intended. "But I suppose there is nothing else to do here."

"What else would you have to do?" The youth scanned his companion closely, but it seemed without impatience.

"There are so many things in a town."

"I don't know much about a town," said Crozier lightly; "but I don't see that people are much better or wiser for their many things there."

"Surely we don't do everything to make us wiser and better," exclaimed Adelina, looking up with genuine surprise and a little amusement, as at a new thought. "We have to amuse ourselves a little, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose so," was the response, given in a vague, indirect manner. "You'll miss your piano, I'm afraid?"

"Haven't you got one?" The question was put in such a tragic tone, and was accompanied with such a look of startled amazement that Crozier could not repress a laugh as he uttered his negative.

That the youth had a perception of the humorous was evident, despite the solemn expression which was ordinarily upon his face. As Adelina had felt from the outset, even he was not a man to be immediately understood like the acquaintances she was used to. She no longer stood in actual fear of him, but the inability to feel familiar prevented anything like ease. She never knew what would come next, nor could she feel at all sure of what he was thinking of her. Her sense of uneasiness, moreover, was confused with one of resentment, for she had come with a very firm conviction of

her mental, moral, and material superiority over her sheep-tending, hill relations—the least barbarous of whom, at the age of twenty-four, could admit, without blushing, complete ignorance of a town, and the diversions of it. She had, at least, expected unquestioned deference, however boorish their way of manifesting it. Instead of all this she had found the father a positively ferocious savage of whom she stood in bodily dread, and the son a supercilious nondescript, who took little pains to disguise his very light opinion of her.

There was excuse for Adelina in her perplexity, for the local reputation of the Croziers, where they had for generations dwelt, and where, consequently, their characteristics might presumably be got at, was obscure and mythical. Even their neighbours were shy of them, and never in the memory of man had any member of the family made the smallest movement towards a removal of the haze, or even fog, which encircled Bygate.

Inhumanly fierce to begin with had been one and all accounted, so outrageously so, indeed, that the early death of a younger brother of Sibbald's was attributed in the popular mind to the direct violence, if not to the direct act, of the boy's own father. However, as no peace authorities had interfered with the normal burying of the child at the Howff, there was possibly some other construction of the event had the family deigned to proclaim it in public. The old woman that ministered to the dead stoutly upheld the theory of violence to her dying day.

In a character of any imagination and any native independence, reputation such as this easily becomes rather a cherished inheritance; possibly it was so with the Croziers of Bygate. They seemed to live comfortably under the suspicion of their neighbours, and (if in this also common report was accurate), to thrive on it. Shepherd yeomen though they were, they were said to be

wealthy. The only concession to anything like a sympathetic estimate confessed by their neighbours was this appellation of Scholar given to the latest representative of the race. But into this, too, entered a fair share of the traditional credulity, and it was by no means intended to displace the qualities which were the common property of his family. His extraordinary learning, evidenced mainly by backstair gossip of his books, was accounted an addition merely, and there was small doubt but that it was used mainly for purposes which were by no means canny.

Fortunately for Adelina, she had known nothing of all this. Her opinion was formed upon what she had seen and felt since her arrival, and that was sufficient for her. Had it been otherwise, Sibbald's task of comforting her would, no doubt, have been harder. That he had in some measure comforted her was obvious, for she no longer wept, and she disclosed from time to time a glimpse of pettish-

ness in her behaviour. An uneasy glance at the dark window, though, against which the wind hurled itself, and at the hollow chimney in which it moaned, betrayed a constant source of alarm. The wind does sound differently in different localities, and the girl might be pardoned if she here felt it a stranger to her. The sombre personality of it, too, was not to be avoided in such a situation. As Crozier had reminded her, it alone was in possession of the hills at that hour, ruffling the bent, whistling in the heather and the gorse knobs, mowing down the brown bracken on the slopes over which it sped. Whatever the man's fanciful brain might see in all this, to Adelina it was simply horrible. So far as they had any existence at all for her, the natural forces had hitherto been but the varying fringe of each day's garment ; here they claimed a whole empire for themselves, for which she felt scant sympathy, since, for one thing, they hinted so broadly that perhaps they were the superior.

When Sibbald had convinced himself that no further enlightenment on the situation was to be had from his cousin, he drew her on to other subjects with a genuine attempt at making her position more tolerable. The undertaking was a novel one for him, and not one for which he was especially suited. Although a man of open-air existence, his mind had been formed in solitude and in communion with books. This had never been irksome to him, for (owing perhaps to the circumstances of generations), the social instinct had but the smallest development in him. Nature had endowed him with a strong intelligence, and with more imagination than had been the common lot of his family, so that he had inevitably tended towards the cynical, or, at least, the over-critical in his judgment of men and of the world. It was scarcely strange, in view of his ancestry, that theology had never to any extent engaged his energies, as is commonly the case with men in

his position. This fact alone had helped to separate him from his kind, and to foster the unsociable temperament with which he had set out.

Adelina was doing her little best to get her mind into submission to the inevitable, for that one night at least, when fate again stepped in to disturb her. As she listened with one ear to her cousin and with the other to the wind, a fresh sound came to break the quiet of the house; a sound which her ruffled nerves found no difficulty in explaining.

"He is coming up," she exclaimed in a terrified whisper, and looking with a tragical stare at the door.

There was, undoubtedly, a heavy footstep on the uncarpeted stairs, and it came upwards.

"Well, he won't eat you," said Sibbald with a frown. "Listen; yes, he is coming here. . . . Well, father?"

"The deil's in you," said the gruff voice outside,

as the door was tried and found to be fastened.
“Come away, Sib, I want to speak to ye, man.”

“Don’t open it,” shrieked the girl, as she clung to her cousin for protection. It was with difficulty that he repressed his impatience, or even anger, for he was not accustomed to displays of this kind. Calling to his father that he would come, the footsteps departed, and Adelina grew more calm.

“Now, come, and you can go to Isabel.”

When Sibbald had placed his timid charge in the hands of the woman who played the part of servant and housekeeper in the place, he went to the room which his father occupied. It might be called the parlour of the house, and it was not furnished with a view to any special requirements in the owner. In this respect it offered a contrast to the room in which the young man and his cousin had been sitting. You could hazard a guess as to some, at least, of the special characteristics of the occupant of that one, but this

room might have pertained to any grim yeoman of the hills, from the moss-troopers downwards. The furniture was very plain, very solid, evidently of great age, and in nothing superfluous. The dusk of ages seemed to linger in the shadows of its legs and corners, and the ancient leather and hangings exhaled the questionable fragrance of one or two lost chapters of border history. The middle-aged figure now seated at the table (such a table! whereon, perchance, spurs had in its time been significantly dished by some imaginative mistress), was equally typical, and in every way appropriate to the peculiar setting. Papers were spread out before him, over which he had apparently been poring. Over his forehead fell ruffled grizzly hair, through which, no doubt, his fingers had passed occasionally, as they did now when his son appeared. You could associate ferocity with such a countenance, but by no means habitual bad nature or even ignoble rage.

As Sibbald had hinted, such a man would have a cause for every ebullition of his wrath. In looking closer, too, although far from discerning any positive degradation or decay, you might have suspected that the man had lived hard, had been beset by some of the elemental passions of his kind, and had not been always the victor. It was a rugged face, such as you see sometimes carved in a massive cloud which rises from behind a mountain when the sky is blue.

"What do you think o' yon?" was the blunt inquiry with which the son was met.

"Partly fool; mainly unfortunate."

"Hoot, man, cut out the unfortunate and ye're no exactly wrong. Scoundrels aye breed fools i' the gimmer line. But do you think she'll mend?"

"Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him," said Sibbald

sententiously, whereat his father frowned but then burst into laughter.

"That'll be Solomon, daur say. We'll mak' the old Israelite a fool for yence. Anyway we'll bray yon lass, and see."

"Is that what you have brought her here for?"

"No just entirely; but it'll do to start wi', ye ken," said the old man, handling some of his papers. "If we canna get the foolishness *oot*, we'll see if we canna get a pickle honesty *in*, anyway," added he vehemently. "My sartie, if I could get yon man i' my niece!" The table shook with the weight of that niece—a fist of Herculean proportions and power. "And, look you, lad, I dinna believe yon's dead at a'!"

The voice was lowered at this singular suggestion, and the father fixed his eyes resolutely upon those of his son.

"What, her father!"

"Ay, ay, just. . . . But, never heed—never heed,

Ye'll hae to be through to Newcastle in twa-three days. They ken me ower weel. Ye maun be down to the post every day, hear ye. If he's a tod, or a brock, daur say, we'll be the hounds. Twa thousand pounds, man! A' your ain one day. And to be fair swindled by the like o' yon! And that I should live to be a fool, the worst part on't. Ha'd awa', man! Gash—"

And the old man leaped up with a torrent of round oaths,—good, deep, moss-trooping imprecations, before which his son stood unmoved, with an aspect of philosophical reflection. When the flood was spent, the latter spoke.

"But can we punish the lass for it?"

Sibbald had quailed before that eye in by-gone days; but, until now, not latterly. He stood firm, however, outwardly unmoved, so the frenzy passed.

"Dinna you be a fool, too," muttered his father, composing himself abruptly at the table, to show

that the interview was at an end or broken. “And mind the letters the morrow’s morn.”

The young man understood the dismissal, and went without another word.

It seemed that snatches of the raised voice had been audible throughout the house, for Adelina sat trembling in the ingle as Sibbald put his head into the back room. But, without speaking, he turned again, and went up to his own room, where he stood for some time in meditation. The surging of the wind drew him to the window, which he threw up; but after a brief survey of the clear but boisterous night, he shut it out again, and sat down with a book.

Whilst thus occupied, a tap at the door aroused him, which, when he at length noticed it, seemed to have been several times repeated. He let his cousin in.

“I must go to-morrow,” said she, looking into his face in piteous appeal. “I—I’d rather live in the workhouse,”

"All right," he replied readily. "We'll see about it to-morrow. You wouldn't care to go to-night in this wind?"

"Even you—o—only laugh at me."

"I only laugh at your absurdity. Go to bed and forget all your troubles. You'll be safe there."

"I am going to sleep with Isabel to-night."

"Then sit here until supper-time."

In his prompt way he put her into a chair, and gave her a picture-book to look at, then reverted to his own reading.

Presently he looked up from his book unexpectedly, and found Lina's eyes upon him.

"How long was your father ill?" he asked.

"He died very suddenly when I was away from home. I had not heard of his being ill at all!"

"H'm," and they relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW ELEMENT.

WORN out by nervous exhaustion from her fright, Adelina at length slept, long and soundly. When she awoke she was in the bed alone; sunshine flooded the chamber, and the wind whistled, even occasionally howled, around the house. The board which was fitted in the fireplace flapped to and fro, and made soft, strange noises, highly alarming to the timid girl until she recalled the explanation of them which had satisfied her over-night. Emboldened by the brilliant sunshine in her conflict with the evils of the day, she at length got up, and was horrified to find that her door stood ajar. She had slept with it in that condition, at

any rate since her companion had left her, probably before the dawn! As there was no key in the lock, she had to adopt the time-honoured method of barricading by means of a chair-back beneath the handle.

Her precaution proved to be needless, for when Adelina ventured downstairs she could find nobody at all in the house. In the large room, which she called the kitchen, there were signs of a repast upon the table, and elsewhere indications of household work recently abandoned. Whilst surveying the place, and wondering what might next besfall her, a door was opened with unnecessary clatter, and Isabel came in, her thick boots echoing loudly on the stone floor.

“Tarr’ble blawy the day, hinny,” was the woman’s greeting, to which Adelina timidly assented, however imperfectly she understood. “Ye’ll be wanting your breakfast, likely?”

Despite her fears, upon this point the girl had

no doubt, and answered with increased assurance accordingly.

A minute or two was enough for the readjustment of the table, and for Lina to see unfolded before her a very appetising repast. From the oven a dish of savoury matter was produced, which she had to discover for herself to consist of smoked salmon cutlets mingled with rashers of bacon floating in the combined juices of the two. The usual accompaniments of a north country breakfast were already on the board—porridge, marmalade, and the rest.

“Mr. Sibbald cooked it for ye himsel’, ye ken,” said Isabel with a grin, as she watched the young woman begin. “I didna het the few parritch,” she went on presently, “for I sec’d ye didna like ‘em ower weel yesterday. They’ll no eat ‘em in Newcastle, daur say?”

Although Adelina’s replies were mostly monosyllabic, the woman chattered on in this friendly

way as she prosecuted her own work at a table bencath the window, and the sound was neither unpleasant nor discouraging to the girl. She pondered the fact of her cousin's kind intention in preparing her so acceptable a breakfast whilst she slept; recalled his blunt kindness of the night before; saw the clear sunlight from the wind-swept sky, and felt that, perhaps, her situation was not, after all, so terrible and uncendurable as at other moments it had seemed to her. At any rate she would postpone that premcditated flight for a little further consideration. Miss Brett was not of unbounded resource, and here at any rate was a roof over her fair head.

She gathered additional courage from the assurance, given by Isabel, that both the master and his son would be absent until mid-day. Although the wind was so high there was the sun, and in the light of that she could examine the immediate locality more closely than her distress of the day

before had permitted. So when her meal was done, Adelina arrayed herself in her very becoming mourning jacket and hat, and went forth. The wide expanse of desolate country, in which the imaginative eye might have found diversion and delight enough, fell as a dead chill upon the girl's heart. It mattered not that the autumn had transformed the surface of the great round uplands into a sweeping carpet of infinite variety and richness ; to her eye, inured to the attractions of Grey and Grainger Streets, it was a drear and desolate waste. To and fro, within the shelter of the strip of firs skirting the house, she walked, and with all possible intensity fancied herself elsewhere. In the train of such fancy came vehement railing against those nominal friends of her family who, in the face of her heart-breaking farewells, could permit her to be banished to such a spot as this. She pictured the houseful of orphans that *she* should harbour if only positions were reversed

What difference could *she* make in any household? And some of them were so rich,—ah, if truth were told! She had always thought her father rich, she only—ay, she only hoped that some of *their* riches would prove of the same quality, and then they'd know. If she could only make her own living and defy them all! If she could—but *here* Charlie Robson, Tom Lisle, not even poor Dick Blenkinsopp,—besides, her father dead and a bankrupt. Hardships and ignominy on every hand.

She had come out to view the locality, but upwards of two hours had flown in reflections of this kind, and she had no conception even of the ground she walked upon. Doubtless more time still could have passed in this profitable employment had not Adelina been rudely interrupted in a manner calculated to awaken her worst fears, and finally dispel the hopes with which she had begun the day.

“ Profitable wark yon,” cried a stentorian voice,
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from but a few yards' distance from where she was walking. "That'll be how they dee it i' Grainger Street, I dinna doubt; but it's no our way hereabout. Braw cleeding, my sartie! But wha bought ye the like o' that? Wha paid for it, hinny?"

"Should I not wear mourning for my father, then?" retorted the girl, stung to a righteous resentment, despite her fears.

"Mourning for your father, hinny? Ay, that should ye; mourning enow. He needs it, I warr'nd ye. He'll be skirling like a cat on a het girdle the noo, dinna doubt. Mourn as much as ye've a mind, but pay for it," vociferated the merciless old countryman. "If ye canna pay for sackclaith and ashes, mourn in your sark. I'll hae nane o' your robbery hereaway. Ay, ay, greet; it costs nane," continued he, as he followed the terrified girl, who was fleeing to the house. "Greet your bellyful, and you'll aiblins clear your eyesight. I like tarr'ble badly your mourning out of other folks'

pockets." The last modified expression was uttered as he came into where the girl had found shelter by the side of Isabel.

"Dinna fash the poor lassie," said the latter, in bold defence of her sex.

"No fash her in the face o' herriment like yon, likely! If she'll no heed yae word she'll get another. And, hark ye, Bella, since she canna cleed hersel', ye shall cleed her. Ye'll just get her cleeding like your ainsel', right through, ye ken. Nane o' thae Valenciennes abilyiments out o' the ee-shot; and if I get a glint that I canna trust ye, my sartie, but I'll strip ye baith to the varry sark and compare ye dud by dud. Do ye hear, noo?"

"Ou, ay," said the woman, as she continued to busy herself with the preparations for the meal that she knew would be the man's next concern.

"And what's mair, ye'll bring all yon," continued he, pointing savagely to the elegant millinery in which Adelina was trembling and audibly sobbing,

—“every steek o’ yon *mourning* along to me, and I’ll see that it gans back to them it belangs to. I’ll hac nac sta’en goods i’ this house.”

Vaguely as the niece had heard these stern injunctions, it was not possible that they should convey any reality to her mind. The unpleasant fates, how much more the tragical ones, simply do not exist for the lower order of female mind. It dwells snugly and securely in the haze of irresponsibility which constitutes its world. Despite late days, Adelina had not been seriously disturbed in her inheritance. Fortunately, Isabel had a juster outlook on the universe, at any rate the Bygate one, and so when the man had withdrawn, she had her companion swiftly to the bedroom, placed a heap of her own garments before her, and, unless she wished the old master to do it for her, bade her exchange. Isabel as quickly withdrew, carrying with her only the word “fright” from the sobs which had greeted her announcement.

Sibbald came in when the meal was ready, and the three of the household partook of it together. Lina did not appear, and a glance from Isabel saved the young man making any reference to her. It was only when his father had gone into his armchair to doze over whisky that Sibbald got the explanation.

About an hour later he had a tray taken into his room, and with some difficulty his cousin was brought to him there. The transformation had taken place, and Adelina presented a singular object. The ludicrous side of it Sibbald had to ignore, and, indeed, the girl's piteous condition soon dispelled the incipient laughter. In mere feature Adelina was undoubtedly pretty, and all tear-stained as she now was, she would have excited sympathy in a mind less imaginative than that of this man. He would have avoided her personal appearance altogether had she allowed it. She could falter of nothing else.

"Well, well, my lass, you can play at Cinderella any way. In my opinion you look prettier than before."

With genuinely kind intention thus did Sibbald try to dispose of the matter, and the faintest ray of a smile did dawn upon Lina's face. When she ultimately advanced to a half coherent accusation of teasing, had Sibbald known, the clouds must have definitely broken. A little later she was pecking at her food, and the youth was able to remind her of her engagement with Jenniper. In a way altogether unsuspected, this aroused her, and she promptly declared that she shouldn't go. This diverted the conversation, and in the task of persuasion that lay before him, Sibbald found many of his difficulties removed.

Of course Adelina went, although feeling herself shorn of all the power of patronage that she had had in store for Jenniper. That young woman had from the first leapt into a position of peculiar

interest in her mind. Consummate, no doubt, as was the part played by her shrewd cousin, he was not going to hoodwink her. A young man and a young woman associated together for one purpose, and in Lina's mind, for one purpose only, so Mr. Sibbald's air of such supreme indifference was mightily diverting. Having mastered the natural irritation at the fact of her cousin venturing to have a sweetheart at all (before *her* appearance on the scene, that is), Miss Brett recaptured the equally natural fit of curiosity to form her own estimate of the sweetheart of such a man. Potent, indeed, must such fit have been, since it was able to dispel, even temporarily, the welter of misery in which the penniless orphan had been plunged so recently.

When the two were at length crossing the breezy pastures on their way to the river below, an additional inducement came to encourage Adelina forward in the sense of freedom from

that intolerable atmosphere behind. As pointed out by her imaginative cousin, even the surrounding objects seemed to lose something of their repellent gloom. The shadows of swiftly floating clouds skipped across the valley and over the great barrier beyond, whilst the ripple of the broad water amongst the stones danced and glistened in the following sunshine. Sibbald had dwelt upon such sights from earliest childhood, and by an artless enthusiasm revealed the attractions that were in them even for a commonplace mind. As he had hinted to Jennifer in that night interview, when his solitude was once broken, he did feel the ray of human satisfaction which sprung from communicating his impressions to a living ear. Now he seemed not to notice how much or how little his companion heeded him. He was practising a new faculty, and it was, perhaps, after all more for himself than for her that he talked so continuously.

As they approached the wooden foot-bridge, raised on its piles above the floods which swept down the valley in winter, it was only Sibbald's eye which detected the black speck some way off on the road, and which he was able to identify. He led the way up the steps, and stood leaning over the rail in mid-stream. A dipper flew away below with its cheery whistle, and a couple of "sooty coots" scuttered to the shelter of the bank. The water was already brown, and Adelina evinced real interest in the darting trout which were pointed out to her.

"Those are what you got me for breakfast," said she, with a sidelong glance at him in vague uncertainty as to what she had eaten.

"No, it's not fishing time now. . . . But you can learn to fish in the spring. Then you can get them for yourself."

"It is nicer to have somebody to get them for you."

The Scholar's eyes were bent towards the water

without the slightest apparent heed to such pleasantry. He was really in a wholly disinterested way, reflecting upon the fact that he, in whose life hitherto the feminine had played no part, should be now so suddenly placed in the path of two girls of an interesting if altogether opposite kind. It is not possible that Crozier should have grown to these years without definite reflections upon woman before; but there had been nothing to show that the subject exercised any powerful influence, even theoretically, over his mind. Such preconceptions as he had formed would presumably be of a high and imaginative sort, in which, however, the mere chivalrous instinct of youth may have been sobered by a proud and acute intelligence, as well as by a wide familiarity with books. So there was a bit of self-consciousness in the youth's present attitude to the matter he had in hand, however well hidden from general observation.

"As Jenniper is so near, I shall go now," said he abruptly, his ear having caught the sound which was inaudible to his companion. The latter looked up quickly from the water, and saw the figure scarcely fifty yards off. "You had better make friends with her in your own way, but remember the advice I gave you."

As Sibbald strode away briskly, a clear halloo arrested him, and he turned again. Jenniper beckoned him with some white object in her hand. Lina pouted with sarcastic petulance. As if he had ever meant to go without seeing her! It was a letter which the newcomer delivered, taken on by the postman in the morning by mistake, and left at the office on his return. Crozier merely thanked the messenger and went, their eyes scarcely expressing a greeting.

His father was in the house on Sibbald's return, poring over those mysterious papers. It was an unnatural occupation for the old man, and his face

and temper these days betrayed the uncongeniality of his employment. The bottle and tumbler too, still obviously in use before him, showed the kind of assistance he was invoking, for so commonplace a pursuit as mere drinking was not one habitually to engross the energies of old Crozier.

“That damned Henderson again!” cried he, as Sibbald handed him the letter. “Drunk, I warr’nd ye! I’ll report him. I hae telled him I’ll do it, and he’ll no heed me. He’s the idlest scoundrel they hae had i’ my time, and they hac had mony—”

He continued to mumble his curses against the negligent postman, as he tore open and perused the belated letter, interspersing presently abrupt comments on the matter he was reading.

“Ay, ay, daur say. . . . Ye’re a fool, Sandie . . . the like o’ yon. . . . It’ll no dea, I tell you.”

But there was a sign of relenting as he put down the paper, and a glare of incipient satisfac-

tion shot from the eyes turned upon Sibbald. The latter expected that the letter would be flung to him, but it was not.

"Ye maun be through the morn, my lad."

"To Newcastle?"

"I'd like weel to gan; but no, no, it 'ud ruin a'. They ken me ower weel. Ye must gan, Sib, and, my sartie! if ye miscarry, I'll never forgive ye."

"If I am to take a hand in the matter, hadn't I better know more about it?" said the son tentatively.

"Ye'll ken as much as they like to tell ye. Ha'd away the morn—the seven o'clock train from Bellingham, ye ken—to Sandie Maxwell, the lawyer fellow, in Collingwood Street; twenty-one's his number—big, muckle house wi' a sorts o' trade, heels ower head. Tell him your name, and he'll dea the rest. Ye maun ride before creek o' day. . . . I'd like tarr'ble weel to gan my ain sel'

—but ye're no gowk, lad, for a' your grammar, dictionary, and sic like, i' your crany."

Knowing that his father's intentions and purposes were always well defined in the brain that formed them, Sibbald had no thought of contesting the matter further, however dissatisfied he might feel at the undignified part allotted him. He simply stated that that part should be done, and went out to some employment about the place.

There were cottages for two hinds beyond the farmyard, only one of which was at present occupied by a middle-aged man and the bondager, or woman worker, that by his engagement he had to supply for his master's service. The latter was carting turnips from the field to their winter burying-place, and arrived with a load soon after Sibbald had gone out. As he went across to where this woman was engaged, she broke the grim silence in which her days were spent, speaking

in an abrupt, uncouth way which was in conformity with her rugged exterior.

"There's Hislop speiring for ye outby," was her curt commencement. "Ayont the plantin'," she added, in response to Sibbald's inquiry, without pausing in her work.

Going out from the steading, Crozier saw the figure alluded to through a thin rank of trees, and as the observation was mutual, they drew towards each other at once. The step, however, of the Scholar was in some contrast to that of the tall, gaitered keeper, who displayed indecision in his approach.

"You want me?"

"Ou, ay, I hae been looking out for ye. I'd like twa-three words wi' ye, anyway."

Sibbald had met the man about the hills and had nodded to him, but that was the extent of their acquaintance. He seemed to discern some difference in his bearing on this occasion, but paid

little heed to it, merely leading the way towards the end of the plantation.

"Ye'll ken we hae a difference, likely," remarked the other awkwardly.

"I'm not aware of a difference with any man." And Crozier looked with astonishment at his companion.

"Then ye'se hae to learn it. A' went on brawly until ye came along."

Sibbald stood still to stare into Hislop's face more intently, and demand his meaning, for the tone of his last utterance was defiant.

"Ye ken nicely what I mean," pursued the keeper, "for your scholaring has made nae fool o' ye. Ye'll no ken daur say what for a man meets a lass by night and by day in lancesome places, eh?"

The delivery of so unanswerable an indictment emboldened Hislop, and he stared back fearlessly, whcreat Crozier burst into loud and derisive laughter.

"Ay, I see your meaning now," said he, when this first impulse was over.

"And what is yours? What do you mean by the lass?"

"Whatever she means by me," said Crozier angrily, for the man's tone was offensive. "If it is any business of yours you had better ask her. I didn't know that she needed anybody to look after her."

"Here, but ha'd a minute."

"Has she given you any right to interfere in her movements?" asked Sibbald, his eyes again turned upon the other.

"It's no her movements but yours that—"

"If she has not, you winna mend your chances by playing the fool, I fancy."

Resolutely refusing to hear, still more to answer, Hislop's further argument, Crozier strode back to the homestead where he worked strenuously until sunset. When he went in, Isabel reminded him

that the young lady had not returned. He looked at her in surprise, and his father, who, suddenly entering, had chanced to overhear the observation, demanded an explanation of the girl's absence, and dismissed Sibbald forthwith to bring her back. He found her at Angryhaugh, where she had begged to stay all night. But to his persuasion she yielded, and they returned to Bygate through the gathering twilight.

CHAPTER V.

STRANGE LIGHTS.

RAIN set in during the night, and driving clouds still enveloped the mountains when Sibbald took horse before the dawn. He had a ride of nearly twenty miles before him, the latter half of which lay over a mere track across the moor. By the time he reached this the rain had ceased, and a grey light revealed the sullen prospect. The unbroken clouds floated in vaguely marked ridges over the bare undulating land, upon which were but scant signs of life. But for a startled sheep, or a grouse whirring across his path, Crozier heard nothing but the sooughing wind for miles.

He surprised the landlord of the "Cuddy's Cove"

where he left his horse, for it was a rare event for the young man to attend the Newcastle market, and this was not the day even for that. The innkeeper, however, happened to be an active member of the local Burns' Club, and a man with whom even the Scholar could upon occasion relax, so that as the latter drank his heated whisky he took an affable part in the friendly crack. The early ride and the expedition upon which he was engaged had stimulated the youth to such a degree as to cause his friend to speculate upon the course of events in the dale after he had gone.

Sibbald brought his critical mind as fearlessly to bear upon the industrial civilisation into which he passed as was his custom with the simpler affairs of his native hills. Over familiarity had not dulled his perception of all the human wonders around him, and as he reached the lawyer's office before even the boy had come, he

spent an hour in examining the curiosities of the Quayside. When the church clock struck ten he was again at the place of his appointment, and this time he found Mr. Maxwell in readiness for an interview.

This gentleman did not disguise his uncommon interest in the matter in hand, and received Sibbald with a frankness which gratified the latter, and upon which he as candidly remarked, declaring further his unreadiness to undertake anything in the dark.

"Natural enough, but you know your father's way," smiled the other. "You needn't tell him how much you know, although I take it he has given you the outlines of the situation?"

"All I can guess is that Brett has swindled him out of two thousand pounds, and finding himself bankrupt, has conveniently got buried without going through the formality of death."

The lawyer laughed merrily, and admitted that

that was the hypothesis upon which they were acting.

"It seems an extraordinary and unusual one," he went on, "and, I must admit, requires a little confirmation in my mind, when I think of the difficulties of such a plan (out of Victor Hugo), and also of the presumed character of the ex-town-councillor and social enthusiast. But for the sake of our investigations, we may as well act upon it. It is unfortunate that the authorities consider our evidence wholly inadequate to sustain an appeal for exhumation, although, between ourselves, they would be mighty blockheads if they could conclude otherwise. And our presumption farther is that Mr. Brett not only lives, but inhabits, at this moment, in some subterranean manner, within the precincts of this city and county of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This is your father's contention, with oaths *suo more*. He got an anonymous hint to this effect, and it

came like a match to a pund o' tow. We shall all be consumed in the conflagration if we cannot prove his contention to be right by bringing him face to face with the defunct ex-councillor Brett."

"But in any case is it possible that the man would stay where he was so well known, when all the world is open to him?"

"There are reasons which would, at any rate, make it conceivable, grossly improbable as it seems. And your great advantage in the matter is that you would scarcely know even the veritable Brett if you saw him, and certainly not this mythical one; whilst he in any incarnate capacity would as certainly not know you. Your father is reluctant at present to use the machinery of the police, so we must do our best alone. You have some neighbours called Curle up Braiddale?"

In admitting the fact Sibbald had difficulty in hiding the start of astonishment which the mention of the name in this connection caused him,

a movement which would not have escaped him a week ago.

"Do you know Daniel Curle personally, much?"

"Not at all since he was a boy. I am a recluse. Besides, I don't think he often comes home."

"Most likely not. He is now a clerk in the office of a friend of mine, and is, according to all accounts, a youth of some originality. You know he had a period of—of—experience, let us say, and got to jail."

"I did not. I don't think it is generally known in Braiddale. I believe his father hoped he would develop a taste for the Presbyterian pulpit; so it was said in the dale."

"Oh, I didn't know that, but at anyrate his tendency has not been that way hitherto. He came as a clerk to the Quayside, as you no doubt know. After his misfortunes, my friend took him

out of a piece of pure philanthropy, and has not yet regretted it. In electioneering matters, I believe, the fellow is invaluable; but our present point of contact with him is in his radicalism and spiritualism. It doesn't look very promising, does it? But that is where he lodges, and I want you to make his acquaintance this evening after six o'clock."

Crozier took the scrap of paper and accepted the engagement.

"You would rather I went without any definite purpose."

"I think so on this occasion. Take a blue book or revolutionary pamphlet that you can pick up in the market, just as a common topic; but your interest in the lost tribes of humanity will serve your every purpose. Will you do this, and see me at this same time to-morrow morning? I am sorry to have brought you over so early, but the other object I had in view has failed me. Come and

have some lunch with me at one o'clock. Call here, and we'll go up together. If time hangs, you know that boats go down the river to Tynemouth."

The clerk was permitted to enter, and Sibbald for that time took his leave.

This revelation of the courses of his juvenile associate, Daniel (the only brother of Jenniper), surprised Crozier, and at once excited some interest in a personality of such marked characteristics. The Scholar's exclusiveness was no doubt largely the result of his having had but a small community to select from, when coupled with his own individual requirements. Although by instinct far from gregarious, despite common report, there were not in Sibbald the elements of an unhuman recluse. The pride of an untrained and one-sided intellect, rather than any churlishness of heart, had isolated him from his shepherd kind. Thus it was that he looked forward with sympathetic curiosity to this renewal of acquaintance with young Curle.

The parting hint of the lawyer recommended itself to Crozier, and he passed his time in an expedition to Tynemouth, being at the office again in time for the invitation which he had accepted. The afternoon he spent amongst the bookstalls in the market, picking up several volumes, which he tied together and deposited at the station. As the clock struck six he was on the step of the house to which he had been directed, but was informed that Curle had not yet returned. He would not be more than half an hour, and, indeed, Sibbald could see his tea laid through the window beside the door, so he turned away to walk to and fro until the needed figure should appear.

He could be in no doubt of the correctness of his suspicions when two men passed him on the pavement, one of whom talked and gesticulated ardently as he came along. Such snatches of the conversation as reached the ears of Crozier, uttered as they were with a fervour of enthusiasm pleasant

to his soul, added fuel to his curiosity, and although no opportunity came of obtruding himself on their notice as they passed, no sooner had the two men entered the doorway than he was ringing the bell at their heels. The name which he gave to the child who appeared to the summons, was loudly re-echoed from the sitting-room as he gave it, and instantly a young man came forth.

"Mr. Crozier of Bygate," cried Daniel again as he stood in the passage. "Come away in, man. I might have known you, surely, as I passed, for you have altered very little."

The rough geniality of his reception put Sibbald at once at his ease, and he responded with alacrity to the invitation.

"Another cup and plate, hinny," shouted the lodger to the child, who was escaping to the back regions, and almost in the same breath he introduced Crozier to the other man already in the room.

"Don't let me interrupt you," was the newcomer's request. "I saw you were in a serious discussion, and, if not private, I shall be glad to look on."

It was getting dusk, and in the room here the expression of a face was scarcely visible, but something in Crozier's tone led Curle to accept him immediately as an old acquaintance, appropriating old intercourse, that is, to his own present very divergent mode of life. In his impetuosity, it scarcely seemed strange to him that Sibbald had looked him up, and he at once acquiesced in the latter's suggestion that no sort of restraint should be imposed.

There happened to be one of the periodical strikes of Tyneside proceeding at the moment, and although Crozier had been completely ignorant of the occurrence (if not, indeed, of the whole meaning of such an industrial episode), he soon gathered enough from Daniel's fervid eloquence to at least

awaken his interest in a concrete human problem. It was obvious that Curle must belong to some extreme faction to which such incidents afforded an extraordinary opportunity of airing inflammatory opinions. Sibbald was constitutionally of a reflective and wholly unprejudiced outlook, so that the proclamation of such doctrines as the enthusiast's talk implied, pleased him as much as the wind he had lately heard whistling amongst the pines. His own footing was upon the bent or his heath-clad mother earth, so that the purely elementary comments which any appeal to him brought forth harmonised with the radical atmosphere of the room, and confirmed the easy confidence with which his presence had been accepted.

When the hurried meal was over it seemed then but a matter of course that the stranger should be whirled off with his associates to a meeting which they had to attend. Curle himself threw a bundle of books and papers into a black bag, for

he had an address to deliver, and in a high tone of conversation the three plunged into the lamp-lit streets.

The unusual action really exhilarated Crozier, and his tones had their place amongst the rest. The wind from the river, however, met them as they descended the precipitous incline of the Side, and to the countryman at least came as a breath of comment from the dark universe about them upon the enterprise they had in hand. As it struck him, the words of his companions fell with some incongruity upon his ears, and for the rest of the way he was silent.

The place of meeting was the ground floor of a vacant warehouse, hired for the purpose by a wealthy enthusiast. It was already alight, and a concourse of mechanics and quaysiders was in ardent discussion around the door. Curle was at once recognised and greeted with cheers, which were taken up and carried to those already in the

building. Thereupon a gentleman of middle-age stepped forward and took Daniel away by the hand. As he was departing he turned round to Sibbald.

"Come up to the platform," said he; "you must speak the night."

At this Crozier was eyed by all about him, and the stream thronged forward into the room.

The Scholar went in with a mental asseveration that he should not speak, and, as a matter of precaution, took up a position at a distance from the platform so that the memory of his new friend should not be refreshed: One man, however, who had heard Curle's remark, and had entered at Crozier's heels, took a place by the latter's side, and seemed to turn upon him a curious eye.

"Are ye no gaun up?" said this man presently, at which Sibbald gave a start, for he was deep in thought.

"Na, na, I ken nothing o' the dispute," muttered he, looking into the face of his neighbour as he spoke, and scarcely disguising the repugnance that he felt. The man was, indeed, needlessly dirty, with a beard and moustache of a week's growth. Though accustomed to work in the fold, Sibbald was rather fastidious in such personal concerns.

The meeting began with vociferous applause. The well-clad man who had carried off Curle proved to be the chairman, and from remarks around, Crozier learnt that it was at his expense the place was hired. He accordingly gave the familiar introductory remarks, commenting with not more than average philosophy upon the causes of crises such as these, and ultimately called upon Mr. Daniel Curle to give the meeting its note. Daniel accordingly came forward, and when he was permitted to proceed, struck the tuning-fork in no uncertain way.

There was nothing particularly original in Daniel,
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but he undoubtedly had the faculty of expressing with cogency, and even eloquence, the emotions which have been agitating industrial mankind for several generations. Capital, credit, interest, rent, and other such genuine nightmares of the over-wrought soul rioted in tragical abandonment throughout that hired warehouse. Sibbald soon found that the light had caught the train of certain emotions of his own, and he listened with kindling interest to the various harangues. Two or three other speakers had succeeded Curle, and fully a couple of hours must have elapsed, when Crozier was aroused from his enthusiastic reverie by the sound of his own name pronounced loudly from the platform.

“Is that your name?” said the unshaven man, who had not moved from his original place; but without hearing him Sibbald pushed a way to the platform to which he was summoned.

There was a murmur of expectation in the

room, and all eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of this unknown orator. In a minute or two the handsome Scholar appeared before them all, his features looking singularly ruddy in the gaslight, and after a fresh burst of applause silence fell. Then Crozier's voice arose.

He disclaimed all knowledge as to why he had been called, for he had but that day come direct from the hills, and he knew nothing whatever of the course of life of those whom he was addressing. All *his* plans of life were built upon a wholly different foundation from that of the previous speakers, and since they had required him to give such opinions as he had, he would do so in a few words. Sibbald's voice therewith rose like a gathering breeze playing about the pine branches, or like one of the burns on his hill slopes sweeping down to the linn. Mouths and eyes opened before him into a fixity of puzzled surprise. Although he admitted sympathy with

his hearers, and longed to see all their woes redressed, yet did he lead them what seemed an aimless dance, "over hill, over dale; thorough bush, thorough brier," in hot pursuit of a will o' the wisp visible only to himself, and offering no clue to other mortal destiny. Doubtless he was carried away by a fervid fancy, and was not saying what he wished to say, or, at any rate, not in the way he wished to say it. But at last he seemed to collect himself for a conclusion. "Remember," he cried, "that the hard senseless ground we now stand upon was at one time this living earth—that the softness and the spring of grass was in it, the brilliance and the fragrance of the flowers. Do not forget this, for it will affect your plans. Stand upon the ground by all means, but upon the ground that the sun has formed for us—upon nothing with which we have deadened its surface and in no pit we have fashioned underneath."

This impassioned deliverance was received in

absolute silence, and in absolute silence it closed. The audience was not to be blamed if it did not understand it, as undoubtedly it did not, neither word nor drift of it. The wind which was at that moment rippling the Tyne under its lights would have conveyed to the assembly as much meaning had it turned aside in its passage to blow out their gas. Daniel Curle hastened to his feet to remove the impression, or negation of impression, it had made, and with ready ingenuity to construe the rhapsody into meaning of his own which might be intelligible to his friends. At this the applause immediately broke forth, and Sibbald stood aside alone with a singular smile upon his features.

The meeting lasted but a short time longer, and, as it dispersed, Crozier mingled with the throng, to be carried along with it towards the doorway. His friend Daniel, perhaps disappointed, made no other effort to detain him, being, in fact, engrossed in cager practical consultation with

those more agreeable to his views. Sibbald, on his part, had neither thought nor wish for further conversation with him just then, for the enthusiasm into which he had himself been put consciously isolated him from his kind, and filled him with a longing for the remote silence of his hills. Thus again thrust back upon his own resources, he went out without regarding the crowd around him, and just as the cold night air fanned his heated face pleasantly, and he was about to stride out, it was with some surprise that he felt his arm clutched from behind. Turning abruptly, he looked into that same dirty and unshaven face beneath the lamp. The man requested a word with him.

Perhaps Crozier scarcely disguised his impatience, for now that he was recalled to them he felt the incongruity of his surroundings. However, he assented, and took a few paces with his odd companion to where the road was clear.

" You spoke better than all the lot of yon others."

" Well, what do you want?"

The man spoke with the coarsest of dialect, and yet when Crozier examined him again, he scarcely struck him as of such gross extraction. The dirt was not so much unwashed accretion, as the result of recent contact with dirty things, with unloading of a cargo possibly.

" I should like weel to hac a good ta'k wi' you," said the man, in disregard of the other's impatience.

" I can't talk with you now. Do you want money?"

" Ou, no, that's no my purpose at a'. But if ye canna ta'k *now*, will ye ta'k to me up the hills."

" What do you mean? You don't live in the hills."

" I'd like tee, daur say."

" How can you? What work can you do there?"

" Fiddle," replied the fellow, in so matter-of-fact a tone as to dispel for a moment his companion's gravity.

Crozier laughed.

"Ay, ay," said he, turning to leave him. "If you can find me up the hills I'll talk to you. Good-night."

This ludicrous episode was extinguished in Sibbald's mind by the general result of his adventure. He went to an hotel, where he had once slept for a night before, and after eating a hearty supper, went to bed. As he lay, trying to compose himself to sleep, the thought of his real purpose in coming to the town recurred to him, and in connection with it his father's features enflamed with anger at the useless journey. The Scholar's shrewd intelligence ventured to suspect trifling on the part of the astute lawyer, so impossible did it seem to him that the search for the mythical Brett could be promoted in this manner. He dwelt upon the whole project, and it appeared ridiculous to him, and such as imparted some of its absurdity to everybody engaged

in it. As he dwelt and dwelt upon it, however, it gradually extended its proportions, and became even at length not a dignified pursuit merely, but a lofty and engrossing one. Sibbald had set sail in quest of it, and he wandered on league after league, and year after year, over the limitless ocean, the water of which, though, by degrees, became all black and covered with scum. As he stared at it a face peeped up—one face, two, three, four, nay, myriads of faces on every hand, all unwashed, and all staring at him from that filthy sea. Thus did he travel in dreamland until his accustomed hour of waking in the morning.

He was at the lawyer's office promptly to his time, and was received as before, perhaps even more genially. He gave his report of the previous evening, omitting his own share in the explosive oratory, and the lawyer professed to be highly gratified. At this Sibbald eyed him narrowly, and began to form his own conclusions as to the man's

real views and intentions. Mr. Maxwell recommended correspondence with Curle upon social matters, and a visit to his haunts whenever a day could be spared for the purpose. He himself should open fresh channels and communicate all results. And so Crozier was bidden good-day.

"We *must* do something to satisfy the old blockhead," muttered the lawyer when alone; whilst the Scholar issued into the street with the firm conviction that his legal adviser was little more than a charlatan, to the extent of this transaction, at any rate. Sibbald passed the morning in the town, and returned by an afternoon train to Bellingham.

CHAPTER VI.

LESSONS.

At the first bit of level open moor Crozier dug his heels into the horse's sides, and, giving it rein, himself leaned forward for a reckless canter over the turf. The sniff of his mountain breezes was so grateful to his lungs as to impel him thus to blow away the smoke which he had brought with him from the town. He felt that the metaphorical as well as material smoke would need some violent means of dispersal, for, intelligent as the man in some respects was, he had but a restricted outlook upon life, and his recent contact with certain fresh phases of it had made him partly aware of some of his limitations. The recovered sense of freedom

which these solitudes brought back to him had an almost intoxicating effect for some time, and incited him to numerous foolish exercises of merely arrogant animal vigour, which only a saving sense of humour enabled him to curb.

As it was, he played pranks enough to have astonished his dale had there been any wandering moorfowl to report them. None such appeared at any rate until he had passed that second ridge and was about to join the highway which took up Braiddale, by which time Sibbald had subsided to his normal flow of vigour. On emerging from the gateway by which he left the bridle-path, he came upon a lean and shaggy pony grazing by the roadside from between the shafts of a low spring cart, which also had the appearance of being carved, and that rudely, out of dirt and decay. Seated on the ground behind it, consuming coarse victuals, was the owner, familiar to Crozier as the mugger, who traversed Braiddale in pursuit of old sheep skins,

bottles, rags, old iron, and such like unconsidered trifles, from the scattered farms and shepherds' houses on the moors.

"Sic a ploy as we hae had the day, Mr. Crozier!" exclaimed the man, with his mouth full, and with an eagerness which might wish to intercept any remark from the other. "Oh, if ye had seen it."

The old fellow was considered something of a wag, and always drew to the utmost on the privilege of such a reputation. The other was in such blithe spirits that he reined in his horse and inquired affably of the matter.

"Ye'll hae frightened yon lassie at Bygate, daur say, ye and the auld master atween ye."

As the man expected, Crozier betrayed immediate curiosity, and demanded sternly what he had to do with the matter.

"Na, na, I had naething ava to dee wi' it. When she speired at me about a wee bit lift i' the cairt, I'd hae naething to say till't. But my sartie, I'd

nae sooner out o' sight than she took off on her ain accoont."

"Ran away from Bygate, do you mean?" said Sibbald in astonishment.

"Ou, ay, that was in her mind, nae doubt, but she didna get far, ye ken. I couldna ha'd mysel' for laughing. She's tarr'ble skeigh o' the like o' huz, and your father himsel' upo' the mare cam' on ahint, sae atweesht the two she had just to gie't up at the end o' the big plantin' yonder. But she sat down and skirled like ony ma'kin being thrappled by the dogs."

"And did my father take her back?"

"Ay, ay, just. I thought he'd hae the life out o' her as he put her on the horse before him, that I did, man, and sae did the lass, I'se warr'nd." The man kept his eyes fixed upon Sibbald as he spoke to him, a cynical enjoyment of the narration playing on the seamed and battered features all the time, perhaps to hide his own cunning intention

of reading his companion's. "But he'd no harm her, ye ken. I tell'd that to the fiddler lad who was sae muckle fashed about her—that wanted to ha' the police upon him, and I dinna ken what besides—for it wad never dee to hae reports like yon spread through the countryside."

Crozier threw him sixpence for whisky, and rode on his way.

His face was less jubilant than before this meeting and his pace more regular. The difference of character between father and son had never yet been brought to an issue, but as Sibbald traversed that solitary road on his homeward journey he felt the antagonism to be more pronounced than he had yet thought it. In the youth's fanciful mind womanhood had some abstract claims to consideration, however feeble or dilapidated the vessel in which it was embodied. Whilst following the reflections into which notions such as these enticed him, he

reached the larch and fir wood referred to by his informant, and through which the road passed. It was very silent now, and beneath the clouded sky especially sombre. Crozier allowed his horse to turn the trot into a walk, and the rider's eyes were fixed upon the animal's ears, the sound of the foot-fall alone filling all the air. When about midway, Sibbald's glance was drawn to movements by the roadside, and as he turned his eyes carelessly they looked directly into those of Jenniper Curle.

The girl showed signs of haste in her step and her features, and after that first glance she went onwards without a word. She did not give even a nod of recognition to Crozier, which, although usual enough formerly, he had hardly expected after their recent intercourse. After an instant's reflection he turned his horse and came up with her. A squirrel dropped a cone from an over-hanging tree, which alighted exactly upon Jenni-

per's head, and thinking it came from the man's hand, she turned to face him angrily.

"What do you want wi' me?" she demanded hotly.

"Only a peaceable word," was the astonished reply. "I am sorry to stop you against your will, but I am anxious to know if you can tell me anything about my cousin. Old Faw has just given me a strange story."

"And he well might. I could tell you a good deal about her if I had the time, but ye'll perhaps hear it from another mouth."

"I can't pretend to understand, since it has all happened in my absence."

And they seemed about to part.

Scarcely had Jenniper taken a step when she turned.

"What canna you understand?" she shouted after him.

"The course of things since I left."

"Did you no tell me yourself that Bygate was no place for a young lass to live in?"

"Certainly I did ; but I had made some small efforts to make existence more tolerable, and hoped to make more."

As Jenniper had stepped back towards him, Sibbald turned his horse once more.

"Would she no hae left, then, if you'd been at Bygate ? "

"I dinna think she would. At any rate, she has no other roof to live under, and she does not seem a likely one to make her own living. She must see that no real harm can befall her where she is. If she does her best to infuriate my father she must take the consequences. He told her plainly what he wished her to do, and if she had done it she would not have heard a word more from him."

"But she says he threatens to kill her or worse."

"It is not true. *You*, at any rate, could not talk five minutes with her without seeing what kind of a girl she is. Consciously, she cannot speak

one word of truth. You know it. Her eye never saw a true thing, and her mind certainly never conceived one."

Jennifer looked to the ground as though slightly abashed by his unexpected attitude. She tacitly admitted the truth of his reading of *her* construction of Adelina, but how did *he* (*her* lingering conception, that is, of him) know it?

"But she may be treated like a human being. I suppose she has a heart that can feel, and tears that can run, daur say, like the best of us."

"And do you think *I* don't know that? Why should you think I don't? Tell me, my lass."

"Because you dinna seem to." This was just to avoid any awkward silence that a pause would have put her in.

"Did my cousin tell you so?"

"No just exactly."

"But she didn't give you any strong impression to the contrary evidently. Will you tell me how

you would treat her if she had been put into your hands? Would you allow her all her own way? Would you alter all your own simple and honest manners just to humour her in her stupid and scarcely honest ones? just to keep that baby heart from fluttering, and those stormy tears from running? Would that be your kindness to her, Jenniper?"

"I'll no say that it woudna."

"Then I will for you," laughed Crozier. "I know you better than you know yourself. You'd be flogging her for a naughty bairn within a week. But are you no going forward?"

This was in reference to the girl's movements, for during his last words she had begun to walk in the direction whence she had come, not that in which he had met her going. "No, she had no need to gan' farther."

In silence they advanced for some minutes, both reflecting.

"Why, where were you going?"

"To fetch the policeman," said Jenniper without looking up. When they came to the end of the trees, Sibbald bade her good-bye, and urged his horse to an easy trot.

Jenniper's indignation had been roused to an intolerable pitch by the sight of the hapless Adelina in the grip of old Crozier, on the horse before him, and as she had confessed to Sibbald, her intention had been to invoke the authorities on behalf of her. The tale which the orphan had confided to Jenniper that afternoon which they had passed together had been a harrowing one, not from any conscious mendacity in Adelina, but because she vehemently believed all she said to be true. Appearances sustained it, and the Crozier reputation was even some way in advance of it. Jenniper had been ignorant of the young man's absence for the last two days, so that when she chanced to witness the capture of the terrified fugitive, she could only suppose that antecedent

circumstances had passed under his eyes. This notion had been enough to rout utterly the impression which her own night interview and parts of Adelina's confession had made. Now here came Crozier himself to influence once more her conception of him. In the meditation into which she fell Jenniper turned aside to the cottage of her friend, Maggie Laidler.

"Thir are braw days for ye, hinny," cried the ever active woman, as the girl stepped in to her. "Ye'll be following the rest on 'em, and finding that ye hae a turn for the lady, nae doubt."

"Ay, ay," assented the other jocularly. "It is a braw trade an' all."

"I thought ye were to be the yae righteous yen, my lass," returned Maggie in a different tone from that in which she began. "But I hae h'arrd."

"And you're welcome to hear just what ye like, Maggie, for I ken nicely that that nowt of a

Hislop is blowing his lies from end to end of Braiddale, just because he fand that I didna tak' his bait like a trout to the heckle. I hae h'arrd, too, that he was along to young Crozier, and for that I'll gie him a clout o' the lugs ae day, sae ye may tell him, since ye're sae thick wi' him."

With these words Jenniper took her angry departure, refusing to turn even when Maggie ran after her.

As she strode the bent, Sibbald was stabling his horse at Bygate. From there he crossed to the house, responding to the gambols of the dogs which were uproariously greeting his return. Between their outcries only the musical ring of milk spurting against the can broke the silence of the yard. He looked into the byre, but said nothing, and passed on.

"Weel, ye hae no come ower soon," cried Isabel at sight of him, "for we'd like to hae had murder the day."

"Don't be a blockhead, but just tell me all about it. Is my father in?"

"He's just this minute awa' up the brae."

"And the girl?"

"Gan to the stair-foot and ye'll hear."

"He has locked her up, I suppose."

Sibbald went as directed, and at the sound of prolonged wailing ascended the stairs. He traced the sound to a disused attic in which mere lumber was stored, the only light to it coming through a pane of thick glass in the roof, which did not open.

"Lina! . . . Lina!" Several times he had to repeat the name, with reassuring words in addition, before the girl responded. When she did, she accompanied her words with petulant blows upon the door, presumably from her foot.

"Sibbald, is that really you?" cried Adelina in broken tones. "Oh, let me out; let me out! You're not a murderer, and—and I—sh-shall die here."

"I shall see that you come to no harm, but I can't let you out."

"O-oh! O-oh!" moaned Lina afresh, at such comfortless news. "I shall die here."

"I tell you you won't die. If you keep still, you won't be a hair the worse; if you make a row, I won't say what may happen. I will see my father directly he comes in, and try to get you into my room."

"But I must go. I—I can't stay here. I will die in the r-river, or on the m-moor—or anywhere."

"We will talk of that presently. Why did you make my father angry?"

"I did nothing. But he said he would kill me."

"Not for nothing. In any case he won't do it now I've come back. Be quiet, and I'll come again before dark."

After bandying a few more words, Sibbald went

down to have a meal for which his journey had made him ready. As he sat eating at the table he questioned Isabel again, but could elicit nothing definite. The girl, she said, had been better the day before, but had been terrified by dreams in the night. "But what made her run away?" persisted Sibbald, and ultimately the word "cleeding" was dragged from the reluctant woman. It seemed that something of the old quarrel had been revived, that Adelina had shown more spirit than was to have been expected, had become eloquent on the subject of her father's religion and honesty, and in conclusion Isabel slipped into the very emphatic remark that had the master handled her and her cleeding as he did the young lady and hers, she would hae knocked him down, let him do what he would to her.

It was getting dusk when old Crozier came in, and it was with a burst of astonishment that he heard of his son's return. The first sound of his

voice at the bottom of the stairs was enough to bring the youth from his room, and they went together into that appropriated to the elder.

"What are you doing here?" cried the old man in a tone which would have made his son laugh if it had been a laughing matter.

"There'll be many a journey before we find him."

Sibbald knew that he must adopt the preposterous supposition in discussion with his father, however ludicrous and impossible to himself.

"Are you no on his heels?"

"Not exactly. I have taken such preliminary steps as Maxwell recommended, and he is satisfied with the result." Perhaps there was the slightest hint of dry humour in the young man's tone, and his father eyed him sharply.

"But did ye no tak' the boat to Amsterdam?" Sibbald stared. Maxwell had said no word of Amsterdam.

"Damn ye, Sandie, but if ye try to mak' a fulc

o' me, I'll wring your neck for ye." This was an apostrophe to the absent lawyer. "Why, I ha'e the man's letter to say—"

"Oh, yes, he apologised for bringing me over so early. He found that he had been put on to a useless scent."

"Then what scent has he put ye on till in the hinder end?"

"I have to work through Daniel Curle, who is familiar—"

"Daniel Curle!" vociferated the farmer. "Is Daniel Curle to take up business o' mine in sic a matter as yon? Is Daniel Curle familiar with onything in heaven or hell that ye canna be familiar wi' in less time than he's putting on his breeks? Daniel Curle and Sandie Maxwell baith—"

"But of course Daniel Curle knows nothing about your business."

"Then how are ye to work through Daniel

Curle if he kens naething about the business? But I just ken nicely that it's a' a pliskie o' Maxwell's to ha'd us weel to the bait. Varry good, my man."

"Does Maxwell believe in the search at all?" ventured Sibbald.

"He'll rue the day he ever tried his wigmaleeries wi' me if he doesna," was the old man's reply. "That means that ye dinna believe in it yersel, daur say."

"I have had so little information that I can see no reason for any man attempting so difficult a business."

"Why, man, had ye known him ye'd hae kent it was just the varry business that *yon man* would hae taken in his hand to dea. He lived a' his days by cheating his fellow men, that what for shouldna he think o' cheating the deevil at the hinder end? But, my sartie, I'll help auld Nick to his ain for a' the donnart idiots on Tyneside."

"And I'll gladly give a hand in the transaction," said Sibbald fervently, for the expression of his father's face at the moment urged upon him the impossibility of *his* being the fool.

"Then when are ye gaun again?"

"I shall gan next week unless I hear from them before."

"Varry good; then I'll gie Maxwell anither chance. If ye dinna come back wi' a tarr'ble tight string to your bow then het kale for Sandie. And mind ye dinna gie Daniel Curle ony glint o' the matter. Wad yc hae the countryside ken that a Crozier has been fulcd by a snick-drawing dog from the counter? Na, na, man, yon's no the way—"

"The countryside is like to ken something about the matter soon enough," said Sibbald boldly, "if you take to hunting lasses along the highway."

The youth had calculated well, and the old

man burst into a fit of vociferous laughter, which for some minutes he was wholly incapable of checking.

"Never did you see sicna a run," roared the old fellow amidst his convulsions, all his sporting instincts awaking at the thought of it. "The lass is worth her meat for the hunting, Sib. She caps a' the tod's that ever I followed i' my lifetime. But wha telled ye on't?"

"Several people," replied the son, stretching a point designedly. "Two or three of them were for the police about it."

The mirth left old Crozier's face in an instant.

"Police, do ye say? And wha talked o' fetching the police here away? Just name 'em, lad. Wattie Faw, likely, for yin?"

"No, not Wattie Faw. He took your part, and he had hard work to keep 'em back. It was some travelling fellows on the road."

"Some o' thae Yetholm loons, I'se warr'nd. I'd

be tarr'ble fain to see them and the police baith at Bygate. It 'ud no be the forst scrimmage we hae had by the Braid water."

"They are not likely to try it on," laughed Sibbald. "But will ye let me try a hand wi' yon lass?"

"Ay, ay, we maun keep her i' fettle, daur say. Just brush her down a bit."

Having secured the key with more ease than he had expected, the son left the room, for the twilight was rapidly deepening.

Upstairs the house was in obscurity, and it astonished Sibbald that all was in silence. With a lighted candle he unlocked the door of Adelina's cell and went in. All was silent still, for the comfort which the young man's voice had brought to the girl had thrown her asleep after the violent exertions of the day. There she lay in a bundle on the floor, her head pillow'd on an old piece of carpet rolled up, breathing peacefully. Sibbald put

the candle on a box and leaned down to examine her features. They were pretty and child-like, the rosy lips just parted, and the cheeks and eyelids showing traces of the showers. She smiled in her sleep, and the youth started up, for it flashed across him that she was playing him a trick. The absolute placidity though of frame and feature again banished the thought, and, after another look, he went out, leaving the candle alight beside her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISCIPLE.

WHEN Adelina awoke, Sibbald had her to his room to undertake more seriously than hitherto the task of comforter. The energetic sympathy which Jenniper had expressed for her perhaps influenced the Scholar more than he was aware, although he had been at no time since her arrival indifferent to her unfriended condition. He differed from his father in not attributing to her the whole responsibility of her foolish disposition and behaviour. To any deficiency of character the old man was absolutely ruthless, however weak or ignominious the subject ; in any excess of it, however ignoble, he found singular delight.

There was no couch in Crozier's room, so he had to put the girl into the easiest chair. She proved to be less distraught than he had expected, a discovery which, had he thought of it, might legitimately have moderated his compassion, since it must have taken away from his cousin's capability of real suffering.

"Did you come in with the candle?" asked she, looking up to him when she was seated. "I was dreaming about you; you saved me from drowning in the river. I don't believe you would really."

"We generally save even a cat from drowning, so why shouldn't I save you?"

Sibbald was pondering the different expressions of her face, waking and asleep.

"I'm not so useful as a cat."

"That may be true; but whose fault is it?"

"You mean my own; but I don't think it is, I wasn't brought up to work."

"Then you ought to have been."

"But there was no necessity. My father was well off, and, of course, I shouldn't have had to get my own living."

"Everybody ought to get their own living. Now you know the disadvantage of not being able to."

"I always thought relations helped each other in distress without expecting to get their living out of them."

"And ought there to be no regard for the wishes of the relations in return? But I've not brought you here to argue. I want to show you that it's for your own good to make yourself comfortable here, and to do that you'll have to accept my father's terms."

"His terms!" shuddered Adelina. "He's a horrid, wicked man. He promised me a home when I wrote and asked him, and this is how he treats me. If I wasn't a poor, homeless, and lonely girl he daren't do it. Just because I—I've n-nobody

to stand up for me, he insults me as he likes. I d-don't feel safe here."

She burst again into tears as she drew the picture of her own wretchedness, and just as Sibbald was about to commence his ardent consolation, Isabel came in with a tray of tea according to the youth's instructions. When she had withdrawn, Crozier walked to his cousin's side, and laid his open hand on her head.

"Now, look here, Lina, I can't stand this. Stop crying, and I'll pour out your tea, and we can talk."

As she did not immediately respond, he allowed his fingers to travel to the rim of her little car, and as he played with this she looked up.

"Even Jenniper takes my part," said she, with a watery smile.

"Of course she does. Women always stand up for women against men, don't they?"

"But you know *she* wouldn't against *you*, unless it was something very bad."

"Why wouldn't she?" he demanded, as he went to the tea-pot. "Now, I mean to know. What is your reason?"

"Of course she wouldn't; you know she wouldn't; how could she?"

"Why shouldn't she? The reason is not at all clear to me."

"Don't lovers stand up for each other in this country?" pouted she, with some blushing.

"Possibly they do, but as I never occupied that position, I can't say. . . . Sugar and cream? . . . So you think Jenniper and I are suitable for lovers, do you? By the by, I hope you didn't talk of such nonsense to her though. Keep it all for me, please, or else you may get into fresh difficulties that you don't think of."

Having handed her the cup, he pulled up a chair towards the fire, and sat opposite, fronting her boldly.

"Haven't you a cigar?" she asked, as she sipped

the steaming beverage. Crozier only shook his head impatiently.

"It will be a disappointment for you, then, to know that Jenniper and I have had something else to think about than love-making up to this time, and you will possibly be astonished to hear that until that night I went out to see her about befriending you, I had not exchanged one word with her for many years, and never in my life one of more than a passing acquaintance."

Adelina certainly was aware that this evidently honest revelation did take away half of the pleasant triumph of his having handled her ear, but she didn't speak of it.

"What unsociable people you are!"

"You don't know what a degree of courage it displays in Jenniper for her to have intercourse at all with such a family."

"But you are not like your family."

"It is commonly thought that I am very much

like my family," laughed Sibbald. "But now I want you to promise not to anger my father. If you only do what he tells you, and keep out of his way, you can be very comfortable here."

Lina's eyes rested placidly upon him as he spoke, and she might certainly have had a less comely figure to look on. Despite all her recent anguish, she was able mentally to comment on his handsome appearance.

"But he ought not to treat me and dress me like a servant."

"Anything that he demands that is not injurious to you you must do. Promise me that."

"I shouldn't be afraid if you were always here," was the evasive reply, which Crozier found irritating. He was resolved upon a full sympathy with the girl, but for this protracted colloquy he was ill-suited. A prompt, vehement scene was what he demanded. Adelina, in acute visible distress, instantly and irresistibly appealed to him; but to-

wards this indeterminate state he was not so decisively drawn. Cool rationalism would step in, and in the eye of that his cousin was not uniformly attractive.

Still, on this occasion he was victorious. With the utmost patience he kept her from point to point, exacting her agreement. He was careless as to the apparent concessions he granted, scarcely knowing in what they existed, since he was ignorant of the crop of little amiable pleasantries in a sophisticated fancy. His most direct stimulus was from the contemplation of Jenniper's behaviour and her evident thoughts of the situation. Since his own instinct approved them, he thought only of carrying them out, without too wise or prudent an examination of the ways of it.

The consequence of this was what even Adelina felt to be an uncommonly pleasant evening, and what proved to be the harbinger of others like it. Plain clothing came for Lina, and she wore it.

She began to assist Isabel in household and dairy duties, and for the rest exerted all her ingenuity to keep out of the way of her formidable uncle, and in that of her complaisant cousin.

The old man, as Sibbald had foretold, simply ignored the presence of the girl when he saw that his commands were being executed. For some days after his son's expedition to Newcastle he was unusually taciturn, but as his son also had his own absorbing topics of reflection, it mattered little to either. That strange, almost visionary, experience of his by the Quayside engrossed Sibbald frequently, and when Adelina showed that she was at last to prove amenable, almost exclusively. In retrospect it was enjoyable,—a gathered fragment of actual life to one who had passed the whole of his in contemplation. It did not exactly tempt him to taste more, but he felt that it had made his existence more of a reality.

One morning, a few days later, as he went up

the hill early, he was pondering these things. His father, having set off on a distant ride to Rothbury, had left him to do that day's duty on the moors. It was very still and mild, all the grass and heath drenched from the previous day's rain, but the sky now breaking in places and showing the speckled blue behind the low, grey rack. The sun was hidden, but far away on the eastern horizon the rays were seen descending from an invisible rift. The bark of a heron from the distant fir wood was the only sound in all that span of landscape, and although deeply reflecting, Crozier heard it without listening. Scarcely had he done so when his own dog added a ruder note, which caused the youth to look round. He bade the dog be silent, and threw an eye on the approaching figure which had evoked the protest, and which he saw at once to be that of a stranger.

It was a man who was evidently making hasty steps to overtake him, and a nearer glimpse re-

vealed to Sibbald his odd acquaintance of the radical meeting and the pavement outside. Seeing the young man stop, the other touched his hat to him. The apparition struck Crozier with visible surprise, for he had but at the moment been thinking of the fellow, and wondering whether he would ever appear to demand a fulfilment of his promise. So forcible was the coincidence that Crozier examined him minutely, and demanded if he was really a creation of this world. This seemed for an instant to daunt the man, and a flash of timidity, almost entreaty, came from his eyes as they were fixed upon his interrogator. But, as if by conscious effort, this was extinguished, and a bolder smile came in its place as he mumbled something of the day for ghaists being bypast.

“Ye said that if I fand ye on the hills ye’d hae a crack about yon doctrines.”

“You never heard me use such a word as doc-

trines. I have nothing to do with doctrines, and know of none."

"But ye hae the bottom of the maitter, whatever ye've a mind to call it. Ye'll no forget what ye said to me."

"I have not forgotten. But if you take the trouble to come fifty miles to discuss philosophy, you might, at least, take the smaller trouble to leave the Quayside dirt behind you. I'll talk of nothing until you have washed in the tarn we shall come to presently. It will do as a kind of baptism."

After surmounting the ridge before them, they came upon a little natural basin filled with water, as smooth now as a sheet of glass, and reflecting its banks and the sky above it as faithfully. As they approached, a wild duck flew from the marshy end of it, and rose up to circle above them with a hoarse quaick, quaick, which resounded in the silence. The two men glanced at it, and walked to the sandy margin of the water, where

Sibbald bade his companion wash. Throwing off his coat, the fellow rolled up his shirt sleeves, and knelt down to his task, whilst Crozier looked on reflectively, his eye following the enlarging circles which the disturbance wrought on the surface of the water. This done, and the stranger looking quite a regenerate character, they took seats upon a flat piece of rock by the side of the tarn.

“Now, then, why have you come here?” demanded Sibbald.

“Because I canna live in the town yonder; because I have aye wanted to get my foot upon the ground that ye talked about, instead of upon yon deevil’s flags. Upon my faith, when I h’arrd ye, I just felt that I couldna ha’d mysel’ ony longer. Can ye no understand the like o’ that? Can ye no pity a man whose life has been all along just the varry opposite o’ what he wanted?”

“I believe the wise people tell us that most bodies have.”

"Ay, ay, but no in the way o' mine. I haen't been chained down like a dog in a kennel, and a' the time my heart fair bursting to be free. But I couldn't br'e'k it, do what I would, I couldn't."

Sibbald was quietly astonished at the volubility of the man, and greatly interested in the state of mind he presented. He threw his eyes upon him as he had been speaking, but the other kept his firmly fixed upon the water, whose surface had not yet recovered its ordinary absolute calm.

"No, I can't understand that," said Crozier. "If I wanted to do a thing, I fancy I should do it."

"Sae I thought at your age, my man, but ye'll grow wiser, daur say. I believe ye canna do what ye wish i' this warld, ye ken. Yen seems to be a' happit about wi' a tarr'ble strange poo'er o' things which ye canna fling off ye. Mony's the morn I hae said to mysel,' 'This shall be the end of it. Frae this varry minute will I start afresh,' and when I get into the street, I meet some crony

likely, or I hear something or see something that just carries me off to the old wark. I hae been to every kirk and chapel in Newcastle, times without number, to find just the hand I wanted, and I hae aye kent that they wouldna dea. But when I h'arrd ye, ‘Yon’s my man,’ said I,—‘yon’s the man that could skelp the deevil out o’ me, and just put me on the new road entirely a’together.’ But I didna ken that ye belanged to thae fellows. I hae been to mony o’ their meetings, but I never see’d ye at yen before.”

“There’s nothing strange in that, since I was never before at one. It was quite by accident that I came there. . . . But what do you mean to do here? How are you going to live? I can’t give you employment.”

“I dinna want employment,” exclaimed the man, with what seemed a tinge of irritation if not of scorn. “It would be just employment, ye ken, that would ruin a’ for me. I’m gaun to bury a’

that, and start on an entirely new principle at last."

Sibbald's curiosity increased. He had never before met with a mind of self-conscious unrest, and it certainly would never have occurred to him to seek for it in an unwashed Quaysider. Even he had himself been of too healthy a temperament to fall into the mazes of scepticism in any branch of his existence, a sound instinct and fearless imagination having solved intellectual suggestions as soon as they were presented. It was inevitable, therefore, that the humorous aspect of his friend's predicament should be thrust forcibly upon him.

"It will be a very convenient arrangement," said he to the other's singular announcement. "But the winter is coming on, and these hills are not the most comfortable refuge in a snow drift."

"I hae got my bield red-up already, for they hae let me the old herd's cottage at Whinburnhope."

"And you're going to live there alone?" asked Sibbald in increasing astonishment.

"Ay, ay, will ye come along sometimes to put away the time wi' me?"

Crozier made no hesitation in accepting the man's invitation, for his curiosity was fully aroused, and he had every wish to examine such an odd acquaintance thoroughly. When, however, his companion hinted at an expedition in that direction forthwith, Sibbald did not take it, but got up and led the way over his own ground, bidding the other accompany him.

For two or three hours they trod the bent together, and all the time in earnest conversation. The Scholar could not doubt his visitor's seriousness, although occasionally the inclination to rout him as a humbug did suggest itself. In the course of their talk the man admitted that he had amassed the sum of two pounds by fiddling in the few days that had elapsed since he left Newcastle, and as five shillings

a week provided him with all his necessaries, there was clearly no need for him to starve.

"So this is your new principle of existence?" said Crozier, when these facts were made plain to him.

"It is, and have ye ony fault to find wi't?"

"Only that I don't believe anybody got good from putting idleness in the place of the vilest work that ever was done."

"But ye are out there," exclaimed the other, "for it a' depends upon what you call idleness and what use ye mak' on't. If freedom o' your hands gies mair freedom for the use o' your soul, isna that a' to the good, hinny?"

There was a ring of triumph in the man's voice as he delivered his question, which was echoed by the guffaw of a grouse.

"I dinna think it is," was Sibbald's imperturbable reply. "What can you do with your soul if you've got all the day to give to it?"

"Ye ken that nicely, ye haena walked these hills to nae purpose."

"Do you think I have walked them with my own soul?" asked Crozier in derision.

"That I dea, and I'll quickly prove it to ye."

Whatever else Crozier got from this man he did get infinite diversion. The spectacle of a man divesting himself of a lifetime by a deliberate act, and assuming a wholly new part, was novel to him. As has been said, all his scholarship was in the positively imaginative kind, including under such general term the picturesque past of human kind all the world over. Philosophical conclusions he must have drawn from it, but they were drawn unconsciously, without knowledge of any spiritual ills on which they could have efficacy. Of philosophical speculation he was absolutely ignorant, although he had grown to results identical with very much of it.

This discovery, that people holding warfare in themselves did actually exist, exercised Sibbald for

the remainder of the day. Before parting he had suggested that his new friend should come and have a meal with him at Bygate, but the invitation was declined, although Sibbald frankly admitted that his father was from home and that he should not have asked him if it had not been so, adding to this a general recommendation to the man not to put in an appearance at the house.

Crossing the yard from the byre that evening, Crozier was checked by the sunset, which was one of particular splendour. He paused a minute to look at the sky flaming over the hills at the head of the dale, and then he went to the house to call his cousin. She left what she was engaged in, and throwing a shawl over her head, accompanied Sibbald to the wall enclosing the kitchen garden.

“Isn’t that something to be here for?” asked he, after pointing for a few seconds in silence.

“Oh, it is pretty!” she cried with alacrity.

“But you would rather see the gas-lamps?”

"N-not rather," faltered Adelina; "but you know it is what I have been used to."

"Did you ever discover that you had got a soul, Lina?" said the youth abruptly after another silence.

The girl blushed, fearing a religious revival, but admitted that she always said her prayers, and—and sometimes read the Bible. To her surprise her cousin laughed, and pursued the matter no farther. Instead, he pointed out what he considered the characteristic features of the spectacle which they were watching fade rapidly before them. As he did so, a sound struck his sensitive ear, and he turned round quickly.

"That's my father's bridle."

Adelina looked, too, and saw the horseman advancing over the sloping turf, and, without waiting to hear more, escaped into the house, and ultimately to Sibbald's room.

It did not take long for the farmer to show that

he was in an ill-humour. He thrust away his son's offer to stable the horse, but whilst himself busy at the manger he called Sibbald in to him.

" You mun be through again the morn's-morning.
I canna gan on like this."

The young man thought a simple affirmative the safest reply, and turned away, leaving his father muttering anathemas in the obscurity of the stable. Later, as the elder was drinking whisky, he had Sibbald once more in to him to receive a fuller denunciation of the dilatory behaviour of the lawyer and some rather incoherent instructions for his own energetic prosecution of the search. In view of his father's excited condition, Sibbald agreed to everything, and gave strong assurances of his prompt action.

This time young Crozier thought it safer to prepare Lina for his absence, so, when he returned to his room, he disclosed to her the next day's plans. She did not disguise her alarm, but after much of

the persuasion which Sibbald had found to be most effectual with her, she promised to do her best to avoid any collision with her uncle. In the morning, too, to his surprise, Adelina appeared to speed him on his journey, and, as the sun was brilliant, she accompanied him some little way down the slope. When he had left her she still remained there to watch the departing figure, saying to herself that she would see him reach the road. Just before he had done so, Lina could discern another object moving to the bridge from the other side of the water, and it all at once occurred to her that this was Jenniper's day for Crawston, and that object must be she. She strained and strained her eyes now with redoubled intensity, and was convinced that she saw them meet and walk on together for some distance, Jenniper (she foolishly imagined) holding the bridle of his horse. When she could distinguish them no more she returned slowly to the house, and spent the day in unmitigated wretchedness. He *knew*

it was Jenniper's day and hour, and yet he had never suggested that *she* should go down to meet her and perhaps spend the day with her at the village. The thought was irresistible, intolerable.

If only for appearances, Sibbald felt obliged to spend the night away, although he had no clue whatsoever to prosecute. As Daniel Curle had not even replied yet to an explanatory letter sent him some days ago, it was to be presumed that no further visit was desired from him, so Crozier avoided the man's haunts. When he returned to Bygate in the course of the following day with, as was inevitable, a report of no actual result, the old man's irrational impatience burst all bounds. Mr. Maxwell's zealous and reassuring words were faithfully reported, with perhaps again the slightest tinge of dry humour in the tone of it. They made old Crozier wild.

“ Does he no believe the story yet, then ? ” demanded he ; “ and does he tell you all this ? ”

"I shouldn't like to say he does not believe it."

"But ye hae said sae. Dinna ye begin to eat your words like yon deevil, for I'll no put up wi't."

Sibbald put an end to the interview as soon as he was able, in view of his father's unreasonable condition, but only to fall into the hardly less unreasonable clutches of his cousin, who had brooded over that parting spectacle ever since she had seen it. This, however, Sibbald could treat lightly, and that evening Adelina did not seek his room.

In the morning Crozier informed his son bluntly that he should be away that day.

CHAPTER VIII.

SYMPATHIES.

To be trifled with was the one intolerable infliction in the old farmer's mind, and in the trifler, the one unpardonable sin. His fury against his extinct brother-in-law was kindled really by this rather than by the actual loss of his two thousand pounds. He was persuaded that the man had borrowed his money with the distinct and resolute intention of swindling him, and it was by the vehemence of this conviction that the notion of Brett's being yet alive was fostered. A life of commercial speculation was, so far as he understood it, in any case a life of deliberate dishonesty and fraud, and no doubt much of the sting of that unfortunate transaction lay in the

fact of his having been, under any circumstances, induced to traffic with a scoundrel so engaged. Ex-councillor Brett had been, in fact, a reputable potato and guano merchant upon a considerable scale.

Under broodings such as this it was not difficult for a man of choleric temperament to suspect that he was the victim of a yet wider conspiracy. Sibbald clearly would not have hinted at the supposition of Maxwell's incredulity, unless something in the lawyer's conference with him had strongly suggested the fact. This view was irresistible to the old man, and once formulated, very much came forward to sustain it. He could have pardoned a blunt refusal to believe the story (so he supposed), and a consequent refusal to take any hand in its prosecution ; but to pretend an acceptance and then zeal in the search was intolerable.

So Mr. Crozier travelled to Newcastle in a state of high resentment, and upon arrival at the office demanded an interview with Mr. Maxwell in no

uncertain tone. His temper was not improved by the announcement that the lawyer was engaged, and the request to wait. Ay, he'd wait, but he'd go outside to do it, and if the boy let anybody else in before his return, he should pay for it with his bones. This was strange language, even from a Braiddale client, so the boy had to call a fellow clerk through the tube to discuss it.

When the farmer and his adviser were at length face to face, the latter presented all the complaisance due to an eccentric, but none the less valuable, retainer. Mr. Crozier, however, bluntly demurred.

"Na, na, I want nane o' your civilities—I want yon man!"

"Are we not doing our utmost to unearth him?" said the other in a tone of dignified protest.

"No, I dinna think you are; your utmaist is a damned poor sample onyway, if you are, and it 'ull no dea for the like o' me."

"But, my dear sir, what do you mean? Do you expect that such a business can be carried through in a week? We have no sort of evidence that the man is even alive, let alone—"

"Na, there ye gan. Ye dinna believe that the man's alive, and ye'll daur to tell me so to my varry face."

"I believe what I've got evidence o'f. I am acting upon the supposition you gave me, and as soon as I can get the smallest clue to the man's existence I shall not only believe, but shall not be long in having him by the lugs."

"Then am I to pay ye for getting your belief o' what I'm ready to swear to ony day? That's no my gait, man. I've done a' that for ye. I've telled ye he's alive, and I expeckit ye to ha' fand him out. But ye've neither done that nor do you believe my varry word. I'll be made a fool of nae longer, sae just gie me my writings, and I'll gan."

The lawyer was about to commence a little more

civil expostulation, but his client interrupted it with characteristic violence.

"I'll hear no more, I tell ye. If ye had gien me at the fawst sae much as a glint that ye didna believe me, my sartie! ye'd never hae lived to mak' a fool o' me. Mak' up your bill for what ye hacna dean, and I'll pay it; and put up every document o' mine thegither, and I'll awa' wi' them."

The gentleman could not with dignity contest the matter farther, so curtly stating that all should be ready for him in half an hour, he sounded the bell for his clerk to break up the interview.

When at length the bundle of deeds and papers was in his possession, Crozier admitted himself in too disturbed a condition for any further pursuit of the plans he had formed in the quiet of his moorland abode the previous evening, so he took the next train from the town. He had had some thought of consulting another lawyer of whom he had heard favourably, but the scene with Mr.

Maxwell had so incensed the old man against the whole legal tribe, that he hastily vowed none of them should ever have business of his again,—but as he rode homewards from Bellingham he reduced this threat to *this* business. He went round by Crawston, and in passing through the village he saw and heard a travelling fiddler playing by the inn doorway. The sound irritated him, and disquieted his horse also, so he showered a volley of abuse upon the harmless musician, who stopped instantly, and with one startled glance at his assailant, took refuge in the inn, to the audible amusement of Wattie Faw, who had been watching him from the window.

When the farmer reached Bygate, to his still further annoyance Sibbald was not to be found. In the assurance that his father would, at any rate, pass one night away, the young man had (to confirm a reconciliation which Adelina had with proper penitence sued for that day) taken

his cousin for a ramble to the Corbie's Crag, a picturesque spot some mile or two over the moors. After expending, therefore, what of his ill-humour he could possibly give utterance to upon the other dependents about him, old Crozier withdrew to his room to feed his irritation by poring over the documents he had brought away with him. This soon exasperated him so highly that he swept out into the yard once more.

The degree of kindness to which Adelina's humble penitence had reduced Sibbald suited the young lady well. The walk had been his own suggestion—put in an off-hand way that she might accompany him to view the sheep—and all his behaviour throughout had been such as to enhance that original bit of condescension. He had regaled her with those stories of the hills in which he was so thoroughly versed, and in so many of which his own forefathers had taken a part; and if the general ferocity of the actors

caused the girl an occasional shudder, the air of romance which enveloped the incidents was pleasing to her temperament.

The afternoon was warm and genial, with glistening clouds over dark blue space, and the variegated appearance of the autumn moors was under such circumstances pleasing even to Adelina. Only when she regarded her plain and humble clothing, of which the brilliant sun made so very much, did she heave a sigh. But she had managed to loop up her skirt in a becoming way, and to her hat she had added bits of brown heather, coloured bracken, and feathers she had found lying about, and had under it arranged her wealth of hair in so artful a way, that to such an observer as Sibbald she presented a vastly more attractive figure than when she had appeared in all the glory of a mourning fashion plate. The sense of freedom which the old man's absence gave her enabled her to chatter in

a playful, artless manner of everything about her, so that she presented herself to her cousin in a more feminine and pleasant light than she had hitherto been able to do.

None of Crozier's instincts were really averse from the feminine. His robust health and isolated situation had simply kept it out of his view as any practical diversion. Now that he had been awakened to it, it was inevitable that his inclination should be to the utterly feminine—to Adelina, for instance, in such a sunny mood as this, rather than to the sternly rational Jennifer, who bore too much resemblance to himself. He had never disguised from himself the fact that since the latter's bold acceptance of his nocturnal invitation he had felt very kindly towards her; but then it was towards her in the way that it would have been towards a compatible male friend had fortune ever put him in the way of such. This afternoon, he knew that the foolish Adelina acted upon him

quite differently from this. Because of her very foolishness was he drawn to her. In other words, he was discovering the feminine, and in such first discovery a little foolishness is deemed an essential and attractive attribute.

On reaching their destination, Lina was delighted. It was just such a sheltered nook of rocks (with water falling from a height of many feet over the edge of it) as to charm an ingenuous fancy. There were ferns of various kinds brilliantly green in the crevices; groves of bracken tall enough to hide her; birch and alder trees scattered about. And with all, the splashing sound of water, and the cool fragrance which it sheds around it.

"Oh, Sibbald, if Bygate was just here I should never be discontented," cried Adelina when she first saw it.

"And you would never want the town?" asked her cousin good-humouredly.

"For this? Oh, no, never! I could live and die here."

"Alone?"

"Oh, no, of course not," pouted she. "I couldn't bear to live anywhere alone. Why, I believe even you are tired of being so long alone."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I do."

"Conclusive. But I don't consider that I live alone."

"Loneliness," "alone," and words of similar import have, of course, a technical meaning in minds such as that of Adclina, but she refrained just then from expounding that meaning further than by muttering something about his father being no company.

"Not much, I must admit. But birds and beasts and even clouds can be company to you, Lina, if you know how to make them."

"But I don't know how; I don't understand that kind of thing."

"You haven't found your soul, I suppose," laughed Crozier, thinking of his speculative Quaysider.

"What has that got to do with it? It is religion that concerns your soul. You asked me that once before. Why do you think I am so wicked? You are going to be like your father, I suppose, and call me a thief and I don't know what."

"Not at all. Only I am amused by a fiddler from the Quayside who has come up to these hills to cultivate his soul, he says, and he wants me to help him."

"Is he a horrid dirty man?"

Crozier laughed louder, admitting that he was until he washed himself in the tarn at *his* instigation, and he thought he would be cleaner in future.

"I saw the creature when—when your father fetched me back the other day, and he frightened me terribly, for as he passed he stared at me so, and I thought he was a ghost because he didn't speak, and he seemed to disappear I couldn't tell where when your father came up to me."

"You shall come and see him with me some day, Lina," said Crozier jocularly, but with vehement protests his companion declined the invitation, and changed the subject to one better suited to her lighter mood.

Sibbald had admitted to Lina that he thought his father would spend the night away, so that it was an ugly shock to the girl when, about sunset, and in almost joyous mood, as they approached the home-stead, she heard the dreaded tones shattering the evening stillness. Crozier, too, frowned, and seemed to betray some annoyance. But bidding his companion escape to his room and get the fire lighted he strode forward to engage his father's attention. A boisterous half-hour he had of it.

Adelina had eagerly followed his instructions, and when at length Sibbald was at liberty to attend to his own requirements, he learned from Isabel that miss had taken their tea into his room. He went up in a state of vexation, induced no doubt

by the contact with his father, but as soon as he stepped into the atmosphere which his cousin had prepared for him, all his features relaxed, and a glow of careless geniality shone out of him. The sudden sensation was wholly new and delightful, and to it Sibbald readily gave himself up. The room had never seemed so warm and brilliant before as now in the light thrown from the blazing fire, which Lina, on her knees, was urging with the quick puff of the bellows. The meal was outspread, and the fragrance of tea and hot toast was added to the other subtle influences of the chamber. The firelight illumined the girl's features as she turned them gleefully to Sibbald's look, and she bade him lock the door. Then she jumped up and put light to the lamp, after which she pinned an old table-cloth in place of a blind before the window, and they sat down to their repast.

The next day the old man informed his son of what he had done, and that no further communication

was to be held with the lawyer. This did not altogether surprise Sibbald, and he quietly acquiesced. In view of his own reviving scepticism, he did not venture even to hint an inquiry as to what the new tactics were going to be, and just then the farmer did not volunteer the information. So for the present the matter dropped. In Mr. Crozier's mind, however, it was a source of constant irritation, poisoning not only his own rest, but that of everybody else about him. To Adelina he became rapidly more and more unreasonable, as Sibbald saw. From more or less passive oppression he proceeded to active. We have seen that she was advancing to a moderate degree of voluntary service in the establishment. This the old man transformed into compulsory, laying upon her certain servile duties in the dairy and byre which she had genuine difficulty in executing, but the ill or non-execution of which brought down the wrath of her merciless task-master.

This confirmed the sympathetic tendency of Sibbald. In open antagonism to his father he knew he was helpless, and upon this one topic he had found the old man to be utterly deaf to all reason. So it was only in an indirect way that he could help her. He allowed himself more and more freedom in the expression of his sympathy, and frequently when the land was clear he either did himself, or bribed the farm woman to do, the work appointed.

This arrangement undoubtedly recompensed Adelina greatly for the trials she underwent. She accepted her cousin's kindness with alacrity, and interpreted it to the full as warmly as he ever intended. If opportunity were exceptionally favourable it is just possible that her afflictions were needlessly sore, in view of the proximity and the humanity of the physician. Little as she suspected it, it is absolutely certain that the Scholar detected every one of these innocent devices, not that

he thought any whit the worse of her for their indulgence. They emphasised the feminine merely, and to the feminine this recluse's attention was at length definitely aroused.

Still, so long as his dependent niece dressed according to his instructions, and did the work which he enjoined, the old farmer exercised no restraint over her leisure movements. So she was able to cultivate her acquaintance with Jenniper, to which her cousin's apparently honest disclaimer, and her own growing familiarity with the place, impelled her more than had seemed likely at first. Jenniper, in Lina's eyes, was, at anyrate, a young woman, and presumably of a young woman's sympathies and tastes; very definite qualities in Adelina's mind, and not distorted by any of the later heterodox aspirations of her sex. The shepherd girl had, it is true, appeared rather "stiff" and solemn to her at first, but, then, so had this cousin, and what different qualities had he not

since revealed. No doubt Jenniper was the same. The harsh exterior must be merely the result of their strange method of life.

One day, at this time, it was even arranged that Lina should accompany her friend to Crawston on the latter's journey thither. Unfortunately, the weather proved wet, but her short residence at Bygate had modified Miss Brett's attitude to the elements, and she stoutly declared to Isabel that a drop of rain should not stop her having a day out. The clouds rewarded her spirit, and by the time she met Jenniper at the bridge the dripping had ceased, although a drear unbroken grey overspread hill and vale. This affected Lina but little, and her companion immediately remarked upon her improved condition, which Lina at once admitted.

"It's all Sibbald," she added frankly. "My uncle's a horrid wretch, but *he*—I can't tell you what a duck he is. I'm awfully glad, Jennie,

(you said I might call you Jennie, didn't you?)—oh, I can't tell you how glad I am that *you* didn't know him before I came. Just fancy two people like you living just opposite all these years, and not even speaking to each other! I couldn't believe it until Sibbald declared it was true. I believe you'd have loved him, Jennie, if you had known him."

"As likely to have done it without knowing him, wasn't I?" was the unbending comment, accompanied by the rather grim smile which could, at times, visit Jenniper's beauty.

"Well, you might, for he *is* handsome, isn't he? I thought at first that I could never bear him."

"Instead of which you find that you'll hae to fall in love wi' him, and expect a' the rest to do the same; is that it?"

"No, I'm sure, I don't want all the rest to do it," laughed Lina, rather sure in her own mind that this friend *was* consumed with envy after all, but

secure and triumphant in her own priority of confession.

In reality Jenniper was highly curious. Impressed pleasantly by her own brief interviews with Crozier, she found genuine interest in trying to reconcile the very diverse elements of her own impression, of common report, and of this representation of her new friend, and to extract therefrom a congruous human being that might stand for this mythical Scholar of Bygate. It was solely on this account that she encouraged, not to say tolerated, the chatter of her companion as they trudged along the road.

There was no market at Crawston, but Jenniper had certain houses at which she delivered her produce, and any to spare she sent farther by the carrier. This done, she generally spent a few hours in gathering news from her friends before turning homewards. The arrival of Adelina at Bygate had, of course, been a topic of eager conversation in

the village ever since the fact had become public, and that Jenniper actually had the mysterious orphan in evidence that day put her very much in popular request. This made her return rather later than usual, and as the rain had shown signs of greater persistency since three o'clock, the conditions were not very favourable for their walk.

But the relaxation had put, or rather kept, Adelina in good spirits, so she faced her inconveniences lightly. Small consolations, such as that of the wind being at their back, the rain light, the road a direct one, and so on, were promptly adduced by her, and by Jenniper as readily agreed to. So with their umbrellas over their shoulders they blithely set off, leaving that moderate degree of civilisation behind them, and fronting the grey obscurity before. The upper half of the hills was now wholly blended with the sky, and the lower was only dimly visible for a very short distance. The early twilight was threatening rapidly to extinguish all.

Before this had actually occurred, Jenniper's sharp ear caught the sound of footsteps on the road behind them, and stopping to listen, they heard a voice utter a distinct halloo. Lina, in her terror, urged immediate flight, to which her companion only responded by returning the distant call. This was again answered by a distinct request to "Ha'd a minute," with which Jenniper complied, since she was assured that the voice did not belong to the only man she would have refused to meet—the keeper, Hislop.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, hinnies," exclaimed the fiddler when he was a few paces from them, "I thought it would ha' been Mr. Crozier likely."

Lina shrank with fear at the first glimpse of the obscure figure, and took hold of her companion's arm. Even Jenniper seemed inclined to step briskly on as soon as she recognised the man, but he, without further apology, drew up beside them and walked along. In any case the twilight

gloom would not have permitted features to be distinguished, but, in addition, it could be seen that the newcomer had drawn up the collar of a big coat he wore, so that his ears and all the lower part of his face were completely hidden.

"Clarty night," he muttered, to break the silence, to which Jenniper gave a scarce audible assent. "Ye'll no object to my walking beside ye, daur say?" he continued. "We a' gan the same gate, and I'm no just a'thegither a stranger to ye, ye ken, although ye may be thinking sae. Isna this Miss Curle of Angryhaugh? . . . I thought sae. I ken your brother weel, hinny. And that'll be Miss Crozier likely?"

Adelina giggled at the mistake, emboldened by the man's claim of acquaintanceship with known people.

"Miss Brett, do ye say? . . . I once kent the Councillor Brett o' Newcassel, him as they aye ca'd the scoundrel, but ye'se be nae kin to the like o' him, I'se warr'nt."

"How dare you use such words!" cried Lina angrily. "Nobody ever gave him such a name. He was a good man, and everybody respected him. It shows that you never knew him at all."

"I meant no offence. Were ye acquaint wi' him then?"

"Of course I was. He was my father, and no better man ever lived in Newcastle."

"Weel, weel, I'll no gainsay it. But I did ken him nicely. Mony's the time I hae worked for him on the Quayside."

These confessions modified the position of the man in the girls' minds, and they took a part in such trivial conversation as he was anxious to sustain. He spoke of his meetings with young Crozier, and lavished his praises on the Scholar's head in a manner highly gratifying to Adelina at any rate. The increasing darkness prevented her blushes being seen, and emboldened her to put in occasionally a word of commendation on her own

account. When they came to the bridge where Lina's path diverged, the man jocosely offered to accompany her to Bygate, but this she promptly declined, stepping up to Jenniper to whisper an entreaty that she would keep him along the road with her.

"Ye're no afeared o' me, hinny?" interposed he. "What for should I harm ye? Na, na, I'll ha'd away up the dale or I'll be lost before I win to Whinburnhope the night. But look here, my lassie," he continued, addressing Adelina, "will ye come along to Whinburnhope yae day wi' Mr. Crozier? I'se gie ye a tune, and he'll dance wi' ye on the brae, daur say. Yen is whiles a bit lonesome there away, ye ken. Ye'd do a kindness to a poor fallow, would ye no?"

"I'll sce," was the laughing and uncompromising response, but as Lina turned lightly away she uttered a little scream, for a figure emerged from the dark mist directly upon her. A voice at once

proclaimed it to be Sibbald, who, with a grumble at her being so late, took his cousin away with him without so much as a word to either of the other two.

“Whar did he spring frae?” ejaculated the man, but as Jenniper was already on her way across the bridge, he went forward to overtake her. At the farther end she bade him good-night, leapt the dike, and was lost in the mist and darkness before her companion could so much as answer her farewell.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BRETT.

THE cottage which Sibbald's new acquaintance had obtained for himself was at the very head of Braiddale, sheltered in the mouth of a tributary defile. It had fallen out of use by the territory which naturally went with it having been joined with another letting, and so fallen under the care of a shepherd residing elsewhere.

The real name of this new and singular tenant was Hugh Collingwood Brett, recently gazetted as a deceased bankrupt, under the denomination of "Potato and Guano Merchant" of the Quayside, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The name under which he had entered upon these new responsibilities was

the simple one of Charles Felton. And the man had had a singular history, the merest outlines of which must here suffice us.

As the son of a vendor of clogs and old boots on the Castle Stairs, his start in life had not been brilliant; none the less, as has been casually mentioned, he managed ostensibly to close his life as an ex-councillor of his native city. Some volumes would be required to give even a superficial account of the space intervening. Being a boy of bright, almost brilliant, intelligence, he had succeeded in obtaining a gratuitous education, and had, by means of it, come under the benevolent notice of a well-known Quayside merchant. It seemed then that his fortune was made, and no doubt it might have been, but for a frustrating uncertainty of temperament, which began to manifest itself with his ripening years. He plunged into every speculation (intellectual, spiritual, and commercial) that he could in any way hear of, or

by any possibility get into connection with. But if he was thus everything by turns, he was nothing long. He had been a wine merchant, ship-broker, soda merchant, commission agent, timber merchant, coal-exporter. In religion (I mean creed), ethics, and politics, his tastes had been as fleeting and multifarious. Whilst very young he had surreptitiously married a black-eyed girl from one of the stalls in the Bigg Market; but as he was deprived of her early, he lived to gain another mate in the person of Caroline Crozier, who, as a schoolmistress, chanced to be enthusiastic in the cause of homeless waifs at the time of Brett's passage through that phase. After this marriage he appeared continuously to flourish, until the extraordinary revelations consequent on his death.

Such is the merest indication of what this new tenant of Whinburnhope had gone through. To many, such experiences might have had their value, if for nothing more than mere discipline of

the impulsive forces. With Mr. Brett it was not so. By years of what had seemed fact he was uninfluenced still, as far as ever, that is, from the acceptance of fact. Death to the past was but new life to speculations yet untried, under novel, and therefore apparently less clouded, conditions.

The position of his new abode was undoubtedly favourable to philosophic calm, and the appointments within were in strictest harmony with such unworldly requirements. It was the ordinary cottage of two rooms, all on the ground-floor. One of these sufficed for all the purposes of its latest occupant. There was a box-bed against the wall, a table, a chair, and a few other smaller simplicities of furniture. When he had at last groped his way thither on this cheerless night after leaving his last companion, Jennifer, or being left by her, he let himself into the dark cottage, and put light to a candle. His coat dripped on to the stone floor from many points as he walked over it, so he

threw it off into a heap in a corner, and immediately set to work to light a fire.

To-night Felton (as we must here know him) was conscious of a glow of human emotion which was sufficient to repel the gloom of his extraordinary conditions. He positively whistled an operatic air as he made the flames roar up the chimney of his hovel. Whilst his kettle was heating, he stood certainly on the hearth-stone staring silently into the blaze, but the reflection was but momentary. As he poured the boiling water on to his tea he was jubilant again. The tones of Adelina's voice in his ear had reached some depths which could not have been taken for granted as existent in this man.

But he presented a picture of tragical solitude, as he sat back in his chair, after consuming the meagre fare that he allowed himself, and the natural aspect of his face somewhat belied the spirits he assumed. There were shutters to his

window, which certainly he had closed, but they could hardly keep out the awful loneliness and gloom of these dark, mist-enshrouded hills outside. Not even the sound of the water penetrated to him here; only the lisping of that flame in his grate came between him and absolute quietude. Suddenly, as he sat there, a spasm as of physical pain distorted his features, and with his hands interlocked, and thrust rigidly upwards, he burst into a torrent of vehement anguish and prayer—a mingled utterance of entreaty and reproach; one instant bewailing, with a sense of bitter wrong, that of all who had asked, to him alone had it not been given; of all seeking, he only had not found; that to none other knock but his had admittance been denied; then at the next, imploring help that his weakness might have an end, his manifold sins be forgiven, and a worthless life be redeemed by this one more effort at its close.

When he had washed and put away the few

articles he had used, the man sat to his table with a pen, ink, and paper before him, and was for a long time engaged in writing. What he ultimately re-read, and put in an envelope addressed to Mr. Daniel Curle at a street in Newcastle, was this:—

“MY DEAR DAN,—I don’t know whether you have yet heard of my establishment here. I have meant for some time to write to you about it. You know that it was my intention to justify my new birth, and work out my salvation on the Quayside, upon the scene of so many of my former errors, but those electrical words of your friend Crozier shattered the delusion. It is only upon God’s own earth that resolution such as mine can by any possibility be realised. Do not think from this that I discount the help your noble enthusiasm has given me. Only through you, my dear fellow, did I get the first glimpse of light. Never shall I forget the angelic halo which seemed

to surround you when I turned at the clutch that restrained me from my fell purpose, and certainly never, oh never, can I banish from my soul that dark gurgling water to which I seemed doomed. May God forgive me the abominable thought! It is at this distance hard to realise that it was I, even I, who stood lost on the brink there. Nay, it was not I. It was some poor, blind, deluded mortal of whom I am not so much as the ghost.

"I have no doubt from the days of your youth you will recollect this whitewashed cottage, so I need not describe it. It seems to have been built, or, at any rate, deserted, especially on my behalf, with a distinct view to my occupation of it, and my prosecution of a nobler career within its walls. Crozier is in his way really an excellent fellow, and seems inclined to be a friend to me. When I know him a little better I rather suspect it will be best to confide *all* to him, for wholly impossible as we thought it, something has led me to believe

that suspicions are abroad, and in such a case the young man's help would be invaluable. *He* would understand me, I am sure. He has a poetical temperament, and only such a one can enter into my predicament. He really understands me better than I do myself, by mere instinct, for he does not appear to have built up his life upon any conscious theory. The other day he quoted to me these memorable words :

“—What good is given to man
More solid than the gilded clouds of heaven?
What joy more lasting than a vernal flower?’

“They are from Wordsworth, and embody more exactly than any words I could give you, my new creed. I have never read Wordsworth, but I am going to, right through, for Sibbald has lent me his works. From him I shall get completely confirmed in feelings which are as yet but urgent desires. I shall give my soul to the gilded clouds,

and to the vernal flowers. It is true the best season of the year for them is not now upon us, but rightly considered, every day of the year has its own gilding and beauty, even when earth and sky, cloud and flower, are buried under what seems intolerable gloom. Write to me sometimes, and let me know how things go on in the old town. Above all, keep absolute silence upon antediluvian affairs, and have no fear of your own high matters in my hands.—Yours,

“CHARLES FELTON.”

After completing this, the man got a volume of the poet referred to, and with his feet thrust almost underneath the fire-place, read steadily through some silent hours.

In the prosecution of his precarious livelihood Felton wandered far, spending occasionally even a night or two away if he came upon any promising locality. Berwick, Duns, Jedburgh, Galashiels, and

the regions thereabout thus saw the itinerant musician as well as the places on the English side of the Cheviots. He had had one or two rich harvests by an opportune arrival at some homestead where the annual "kirk" was in celebration, and now the November fairs were approaching. In this way it happened that when Sibbald trudged over to Whinburnhope a couple of days after his overhearing the fiddler's farewell invitation to Adelina, he found the cottage locked up. It was about four o'clock when he got there, and he stayed in the vicinity for upwards of an hour, in the hope that his friend would return. In this, however, he was disappointed, so when compelled to leave, he took a bit of paper from his pocket, and scribbled upon it an announcement that he should come two days later, and hoped if possible to find the hermit at home. This he thrust under the door, and retraced his steps over the hills.

Sibbald appeared especially meditative on this

occasion. He had had no intention of eavesdropping that evening as he stood in the gloom awaiting his cousin's arrival at the bridge. In fact, as he reached there he had heard the approaching footsteps, and so simply stood aside to see, out of curiosity, what the two girls would do, as he supposed they would be alone. The tone of the fiddler's voice had opened a fresh vein of curiosity, and he still stood to gratify this also. As he and Lina walked up to Bygate she had called him cross, and had thought him unnecessarily reserved ever since.

This evening, however, after his return from Whinburnhope, he was talkative, and mainly about the fiddler and fiddling in general. He rallied his cousin on her altered attitude to this uncleanly musician, and attributed it to his bribe of a dance. Well, yes, she admitted that she did love a dance; but then it wasn't only his offer of a dance. Sibbald glanced an inquiry.

"He told us that he knew Jenniper's brother in Newcastle, and that he had worked for my father," she confessed.

"Fiddled for him?" suggested Crozier facetiously.

"No indeed," retorted Adelina. "He needed nobody to fiddle for him. He could play beautifully on the violin, and often did so at concerts, bazaars, and other entertainments."

Gradually Sibbald became hilarious, and promised that she should accompany him to Whinburnhope on that next visit if it was a fine day.

"And you will dance with me?"

"I dance! Well, we'll see about that."

Felton returned home the day after Crozier's visit, in the evening, and as he entered the house he found the paper on the floor. It pleased him, and as he had come back comparatively enriched from his recent excursion, he could conveniently resolve that he would be at home for his friend's visit. He speculated tremulously on the chance

of Adelina's coming, and the thought of this disquieted him all the next day as he wandered up the burn. It was easy in the security of that twilight gloom to permit the revival of parental feelings, but in the brilliant sunshine of this autumn day it was not quite such a simple matter to contemplate a meeting with the daughter whom he had abandoned under such singular circumstances. True, she herself must think him dead; would under such conditions scarcely have that past figure even recalled by this beardless disguise of exterior and language; but there was a limit to his own endurance.

As though to command time for contemplating his course up to the latest moment, the man roamed the steep brae at the back of his cottage all the afternoon, with his eye on the spot below. The sparkling breeze which played about him imparted definite encouragement, for whatever amount of value was to be attached to the impulse

leading to his late development, he did here under the influence of sky and mountain undoubtedly catch an inspiration from beyond the artificial world, by the flash of which his action seemed to connect itself with the irresponsible elements. It was in the state of exaltation to which such influence raised him that he was at length called upon to decide, for sure enough there was Sibbald Crozier entering the valley with a female figure by his side, the whistle of the dipper which they had startled reaching Felton at this height.

Whatever the drift of previous reflection, mere impulse at last carried the day, as was usually the case with him, and forthwith the man at a rapid pace commenced the descent. He pulled up the scarf which he was wearing, and drew forward his hat, and when he saw that Crozier stood in indecision by the fastened door, he gained his attention by a shout.

"Ye thought ye had missed me again," cried

he genially as he approached. "I ha'e been studying the gilded clouds. My sartie, I never see'd sicna sight. . . . And ye ha'e the young lady along wi' ye the day," he went on with an obsequious bow to Adelina, who was inclined to giggle. "Then we'se ha'e to get to the dancing."

With this pleasantry he went to open the cottage door to receive them, and Crozier's eyes continued to rest upon him critically. They all entered, and since there was but one chair to offer, Lina was, of course, placed in it. Felton continued to talk with some volubility of his recent movements to excuse his absence when Sibbald last came, and in doing so he kept up a feverish activity, as one at least of his visitors thought, with the definite intention of avoiding a direct scrutiny of his face. Examine Adelina as he would, Crozier could not discern that she betrayed the smallest sign of any exceptional curiosity in the man, and he did not credit her

with any extraordinary power of disguising such feelings as she would actually have. If, therefore, there were anything at all in his own recent suspicions, it was obvious that his cousin was supremely innocent of the smallest share in them, a fact which reduced their value almost to the point of extinction, for could any disguise (argued he) induce the smallest uncertainty as to the presence of one's own father? But Sibbald was only familiar with a very undisguisable form of character, to be sure.

Although a dance seemed, on this occasion, to be out of the question—much to Lina's chagrin—both visitors readily acquiesced in the suggestion that they should at any rate have a tune. It was all that he had to offer, Felton said, and the only return he could make for their kindness in coming to put away a lonely hour. So he tuned the strings and launched forthwith into a lively air.

It seemed to be a habit of his to move to and

fro, bend hither and thither in an erratic way, as he played, presumably with the intention of emphasising the expression of the various staves, and relieving himself of the emotion they inspired. It was not a graceful practice in itself, but none the less it seemed to excite Crozier's attention once more, and his eyes moved quickly from one to the other of his companions as the performance proceeded. Again he had to confess himself unrewarded, and his gaze gradually travelled to the bit of sunlight framed by the open doorway. He did not see it, but just when his face was turned the musician's eyes were in their turn fixed for an instant's ardent glance upon the listening Adelina. She immediately gave a start, and her features whitened. This also escaped Crozier, for his look remained where it had gone.

From one tune Felton had advanced to another without any break in the continuity of the music. From lively airs he had advanced to grave, until

now he had reached the sepulchral depths of the Lochaber lament, and it was in the course of this that the eyes of Adelina and the player had met. As those of the latter were withdrawn, tears were seen to fall from their depths to the instrument over which they bent. It was only then that Lina recognised the true import of the sudden emotion she had felt. A strange dizziness assailed her, and a confusion of her stricken brain. She knew no definite fright, had made no definite discovery. If the soul is capable of supernatural shocks, then had Adelina's sustained one. She was whirled into a hazy sphere in which her worldly, matter-of-fact land-marks had ceased to exist, and yet was she conscious of some vague, some over-powering impression which she had no will to collect, and as little power to resist. She did not consciously recollect that this dirge which was overwhelming her with its magic sway was, as a matter of fact, her father's favourite air. No, she had caught no-

thing of all that. The effect was with her, quelling her very moderate share of reasoning faculty, without her in the least being able to trace the means. When Sibbald turned from that sunlit patch out of doors to rest his calm gaze upon the fiddler again, he was just in time to behold the man's features succumb to a paroxysm of emotion before the instrument was flung to the ground and the figure of the player dashed past him through the doorway.

Crozier's first impulse was to glance inquiringly at his cousin, whom he was just in time to catch before she slipped from her chair. He lowered her gently to the floor, and thrust beneath her head the first thing which came to hand—the fiddle as it chanced. Then tearing open her jacket and frock, and seizing a bucket of water which stood in a corner of the room, he applied himself to such rudimentary treatment of a faint as an acquaintance with classical fiction prompted. Before he had satu-

rated the whole of her clothes, Lina opened her eyes and said, with a vacant stare, "It is my father."

"Why couldn't the blockhead tell us so in a reasonable manner?" exclaimed Sibbald, who, in the relief which the girl's recovery afforded, turned his instinctive anger against the cause of her distress.

"What does it mean?" Lina cried, and burst into a flood of tears.

It was some time before Crozier could pacify the distracted girl, although he permitted himself every measure which a genuine tenderness suggested. In place of the fiddle he put one of his own arms, and with the free hand he pressed her face against his bosom, whilst he poured soothing words into her ear. There was at first no conscious love-making in all this. Woman was woman to this youth, and he extended to Adelina such treatment as he instinctively felt to be demanded of his sex by hers. Under similar circumstances he would, at any rate, have been prompted to

show the same to any female figure so situated, whether lack of familiarity with the individual would have stayed him in the execution is perhaps a question. It was evident, though, that such close contact with Adelina's beauty must give some living reality to any mere fancies he may previously have felt. It was not in human nature that passionate emotions should continue abstract in such a case. His hand, laid upon that soft neck, which kept pulsating with vehement sobs, communicated a thrill to the whole of Sibbald's frame, which urged him to still tenderer caresses.

"Lina, dear Lina," he said ardently, with his lips actually planted upon her face; "hear me, darling, and I will explain it all to you. Why are you frightened? You are with me; he has gone. Look up, and speak to me."

"You kn-knew it," she sobbed, still hiding her face in the arms that were sheltering her.

"Not until you did, or should I have brought

you here to suffer this? I had suspicions, but could never have supposed he would have behaved like this. It is cruel, damnable, that he should distress you so. Were there not a thousand ways of gradually preparing you? But come, let us escape, and I will tell you all I know of it."

Although she restrained her sobs, the shock had been too great to admit of the girl yet regaining anything like composure. She could not command her brain to hold any rational inquiry, so complete was her bewilderment, so in the security of Sibbald's embrace she wept quietly.

When at length she fully realised that she was with her cousin alone, that that appalling dream, vision, or whatever it might have been, was over, and could be investigated leisurely, she got the better of her emotion, and as her face emerged from the depths in which it had been concealed, she met directly the ardent gaze of Sibbald's eyes. With a burst of tender gratitude she flung her

arms around his neck, and, pulling his face down to her, kissed his cheek continuously. As she released him, she seemed to come still further to her senses, and putting her hand to her cold, bare throat, she was overcome with confusion.

Crozier stood in the door-way, looking out, as Lina put herself into such order as was possible. The musician was nowhere to be seen, and there was no sound save that of the water amongst the pebbles where the Whinburn and Braid water joined. The sun was rising up the slope opposite, bronzing the dead bracken, and all around was marvellously calm. After the stormy experience he had just passed through, the contrast impressed Sibbald strongly, so that he was in a reverie when Lina touched his shoulder behind and whispered she was ready.

In the mellowing light they again traversed the hills to Bygate.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE SPRINGS.

OTHER eyes were fixed upon that quiet scene, and continued so after those of Crozier had left it. Felton had not intended any such revelation, but overcome by the effect of the music on him, he lost control of his plans and destiny.

In a state of agitation little less than that of his daughter, he had fled up the Whinburn until he gained the shelter of a rock, and some birch and rowan trees that grew beside it. The first paroxysm of emotion over, he sat down upon a stone, and cast a stupefied gaze upon the water before him. Crises he had encountered in his life before, but never, it appeared to him, one of this

magnitude. His own deepest emotions had not been so essentially involved in anyone of them.

When at length able to arouse himself from this bewildered state, he rose with a scared expression, and looked eagerly before him as he ran back to his cottage.

"Gone!" he cried, when he found the place empty and the door ajar. "Gone, and I am betrayed and ruined! Perhaps I have killed her, and he—he will have no mercy."

With vehement and incoherent words he instantly locked up his house, and fled precipitately over the hills in the direction they would have taken. But he had sat by the burn longer than he supposed. The sun had just sunk behind the hills, its flood of amber light deepening to orange with tinges of purple on the cloudlets above. On and on he sped, but could get no glimpse of them. They were already there, and he—he—was lost. The most frantic thoughts assailed him. When

within view of the house he dared go no farther, so he slunk away to the higher parts of the hills. The twilight fell with all its solemnity, and in the sky, streaked only towards the west with dark dead clouds, which, to this man's eye, became outstretched alligators, the larger stars appeared. Still he stalked the hills like a ghostly phantom, terrifying the sheep and roosting grouse. Whatever his first mad impulse of self-destruction, it passed, or rather, he was violently rescued from it by that haunting visage of his daughter. As the light grew less and less, once more he retraced his steps towards Bygate. There she was, and—and perhaps there yet was time. He reached the fir-trees behind the house and lingered there until it was quite dark. Then he crossed to the cottage occupied by the hind, in which there was a light. He timidly knocked, and the woman answered it. She was inclined to be frightened by his wild eyes, but secure in the light and the man behind her, she demanded what he wanted.

"I want to see Mr. Crozier,—the young man, Mr. Sibbald. Will ye gan and ask him? Just on the quiet, ye ken, and no for the warld o' ye to let the old yane ken a word aboot it."

"What do ye want wi' him at siccan a time, mun?" asked the hind himself, coming forward to peer at his odd visitor.

"Oh, he'll just dea me a wee bit kindness, daur say. I had a crack wi' him the day, and if ye'll but just let him ken that the fiddler wad hae twa-three words mair wi' him ayont the plantin', I'll be thankful, ay, mair nor thankful, to ye."

After a muttered conversation between the two inside, the woman went on her errand to the house, receiving a repeated injunction from Felton to do it canny. She tapped at the door and walked in. Isabel was alone ironing, and all the house was still. Her message to Sibbald in his room was easily delivered, and presently the young man himself appeared.

Acting upon the instructions given to him, Crozier went to the far end of the plantation, and found Felton, who was tremulously awaiting him, and whose first inquiry was after the girl. She was better now, he was told, but no thanks to him.

"For God's sake do not tell me that," was the reply, in a voice unknown to Sibbald. "And I? Have you abandoned me to my fate?"

The suspense of that moment almost deprived Felton of power to stand, and he let himself rest against the trunk of the nearest tree. Sibbald, ignorant no doubt of the awful tension, seemed inclined to stretch it out, for second after second sped before he answered.

"I have not yet done anything either way," was ultimately his calm response.

"Then you have saved a human soul from destruction," exclaimed the other in the rebound inevitable in such a situation.

"Curse me, despise me, spurn me like a dog—I deserve it all, and more than all; but, for the sake of Adelina, I implore you not to betray me to your father. Nay, do not utterly condemn a poor outcast wretch, even in your own mind, without a full and patient hearing. This is all I have come to ask to-night. Assure me that you will take no step to reveal my existence until I have talked with you again, and I shall depart."

"Certainly, I promise you that. It was, in fact, my intention."

Without another word Felton clutched the hand of his companion in both of his and pressed it long and ardently. Then dropping it, he disappeared into the darkness, and Sibbald returned to the house.

That exquisite sky ushered in two more days of wind and rain, days upon which Felton did not leave the precincts of his cottage. It was not altogether the elements that restrained him, for in

his new way of life he was prepared for the worst that they could offer; rather was it that energy was quelled in him by his recent agitation, and a period of quiescence was indispensable for the recovery of strength. Upon neither day did Sibbald come, and this delay added depression to the sense of restlessness by which he was harassed. He tortured himself with imaginary explanations of his nephew's absence. Perhaps Adelina was ill; perhaps Sibbald himself had changed his mind. In the morning of the third day, however, his doubts were resolved, for as Felton was carrying a bucket of brown water from the burn, Crozier came.

There was some little shamefacedness in the fiddler's greeting, but the visitor took the proffered hand, which was extended in silence. The clouds hung grey and sombre over the hills, but there was no rain, so that when the recluse had got rid of his burden he suggested that they should climb the brae.

“These walls are too narrow for the talk we are

to have. Under the free expanse of heaven only can the soul find words." So the two set off.

Sibbald noted the striking alteration in the man's appearance. He was scrupulously clean and brushed, and his clothes, though the same he had always worn, had a tidier look. His speech, too, was that of the average man, instead of the ultra-vernacular which he had for purposes of disguise hitherto assumed. On the whole, the young man's instinctive inclination was to endorse to the uttermost his father's expressed opinion as to the consummate scoundrelism of their worthy relative.

"In the first place, let me emphasize one point," Mr. Felton began. "I did not intend to reveal myself to my daughter in such a precipitate manner, but in any case I had resolved to confess everything to you upon that or the earliest possible occasion. I have had the conviction that you would understand me, and feeling this, I decided to throw myself utterly upon your generosity and sympathy."

"Rather a wide decision," remarked Crozier dryly.

"You will hardly think so when I tell you all. In speaking to you I am able to take for granted the sincere and poetical outlook. A practical business man would judge me unmercifully, simply because of the sordid grounds upon which his opinion would be based. We, from our former conversations, and with those first golden words of yours ringing in my ears,—we, I say, in view of this universe around us, take a slightly higher standpoint."

"Can any standpoint, however high and universal, justify a course of fraud?" was Sibbald's innocent inquiry.

"Fraud?" The tone in which the word was uttered showed it to be a new one to Mr. Felton.

"Fraud, absolute and undisguised. What would be your name for a piece of grave jugglery by which a man gets rid of all his debts and all the other responsibilities of his life?"

"You are a traitor to yourself, Sibbald, if you can speak so," exclaimed the other vehemently. "Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment? Do you think it was to get rid of my debts and my other responsibilities that I have endured the tortures of this regeneration? Do you class me with a common felon,—a dastardly, absconding debtor, whose only anxiety is for the safety of his bones? Has my conduct pointed to such? Could I not have fled to the farthest corners of the earth if such had been my consideration? Would philosophy such as yours ever have reached a scoundrel in that predicament?"

"Then how do you explain the matter?"

From glimpses of his companion's features, Sibbald could not doubt of his desperate earnestness, of his genuine reconciliation of the diverse elements suggested at any rate in his own mind. It was this which restrained the Scholar's impatient attitude to the inquiry as much as his

humorous one. So, with sober features, he attended to the impassioned outburst that followed.

"Ay, how explain it!" cried Felton. "Words are paltry weapons for the purpose, unless they could be depicted in tears and blood. You, my lad, have been born to the light, from the womb upwards; I as certainly have grovelled in the night. For fifty-two years did I live without ever being myself; without ever realising, without ever approaching, the character which I knew to be mine. Frequently within sight of land, yet was the boiling surf so tremendous that I could never reach the land. Is this a pleasant prospect for a man? Is it a condition which deserves no other word but fraud?"

So utterly alien to all self-conscious turmoil was Crozier's temperament that he was now assured the man was mad, as for some time he had inevitably suspected. Yet was there enough method in it to sustain his curiosity. Felton glared at

him, but the other nodded merely as a sign for him to proceed.

"At length the day came when it seemed to me that this must cease, that utter annihilation was preferable to a hell of such despair and disaster. I went to Tynemouth to give myself to the waves—to sink my griefs and failures, my wild resolutions and prayers, in the restless ocean, on which *they* might toss to eternity so long as I at least was below. I lingered there some days, unable to complete my resolve, but the night came. I walked swiftly along the breakwater when the tide was full, my eyes eagerly bent on the splashing and the gurgling water. If I could tell you what I then felt—but I won't attempt it. There were voices of welcome on the breeze that was blowing, and I shouted (I believe aloud), 'I am coming.' Just as I was about to plunge, with more wild happiness than ever I had known in my life, I felt a clutch upon me, and, turning with a sudden terror, I looked

into the face of Daniel Curle. I told him my purpose, and it horrified him. He took me back, and for all that night he talked. I have never heard words that so overpowered me. I couldn't tell you them if I tried, but they saved me. When I left him in the morning I swore to him that my life should be a changed one, that here in the flesh would I divest myself of all the horrors that had driven me to such madness, that I would begin life afresh. On my way to the station I read on the newspaper bills, '*Death of Mr. H. Collingwood Brett.*' My brain reeled. Was I dead, then, as I had intended? Either I or all the world was mad. Was it possible, I asked in a frenzy, that there is another world, and that it is an exact counterpart of the one I had fled from? In a state of bewilderment I rushed back to where I had left Daniel. He hurried for a paper, as excited as I was, for he is a spiritualist, and he thought that here was some proof of his doctrines. Together we read an ac-

count of my having died suddenly from heart disease in an hotel at Shields. Then the explanation dawned on me, and my senses returned. It must be my brother, whom for some time I had expected, and who from his resemblance had been mistaken for me. But with the thought another flashed instantly upon me. ‘It is a sign,’ I cried. ‘Dead I am to be, Daniel, and dead to my old self I will be.’ Daniel eyed me, and I revealed my thought to him. Under such circumstances, could I not really start life on a new footing? Dead we decided I should be, that I might live again. Daniel promised to help me, and he crossed immediately to Shields. He was struck by my likeness to the dead man, and he had no difficulty in carrying out the plan upon which we had decided. My brother was buried for me, and I sought salvation under the guise of a new man. Is there not in that the hand of Heaven?”

Although Sibbald did not directly trace the agency suggested, he did not directly oppose it.

"There is!" continued Brett; "you know in your heart that there is. It was the clearest indication that any creature could have of his resolution being approved. I was to live again. With all the sordid distractions of the world torn from me, I was to give my remaining time to my soul. To show that I accepted the commission as it was intended, I decided to go to the roots. On the very ground would I prosecute my endeavours. Having removed my beard and all outward traces by which I could possibly have been recognised, I returned to the Quayside to expiate there by the labour of my hands all the errors of my former life. If you think such a course was wholly a pleasant one you do not know me. In it I sacrificed my flesh as sincerely as ever a penitent did in the desert. I should have been doing so still, if you with your irresistible message had not come to proclaim that I was in error, that in fact I was walking upon the devil's ground instead of upon God's. Is this

fraud?" he vociferated. "Is this the behaviour and the motive of a scoundrel, of a common felon? Is it, Sibbald? In the name of God I appeal to you."

"It is an extraordinary story, and, I do not doubt, a true one," was Crozier's reply. "Still, it is not one with which I can sympathise, as you suppose."

"With what in it are you unable to sympathise?"

"What was to become of Adelina, for instance?"

Felton's face became almost purple. Without any resolute intention, it was clear that Sibbald had pierced to the very marrow the one vulnerable spot in the penitent's system. In the momentary pause that followed, Crozier turned his eyes upon his companion and noticed the terrible effect. For that moment he undoubtedly did sympathise with him, but silently.

"You have found the only rock upon which I could ever by any possibility have founded," answered the sufferer at last. "You think that I

left her easily, that I threw her off as one of my responsibilities. Spare me that taunt, my boy, until you have held a child of your own to your breast. You will then know that I did not *throw* her, but that I *tore* her from the bottom of my heart, and left the gap irreparably bleeding. Should I have failed in my resolution before her if I had simply cast her from my arms?" continued the man with a tremor of emotion in his voice. "Should I have caused her a shock which was enough to deprive me of her and of my reason for ever, if she had been nothing to me? Do not chop in two a wounded worm. For her good only did I die to her. Salvation such as mine she never had need of, and as a course of life she could never have lived through it. I had failed utterly in all my attempts to establish for her the life which was her due, so I saw that even in that would my death be a boon. I did not foresee what has actually happened, for I had never dreamed of your father offering her a home; but I

felt assured that some other friend would. I thought it not unlikely that she would marry. But now I know that what philosophers say of friends is true. For your behaviour to my girl I—I—" the man's voice completely broke—"it only equals that you have shown to myself."

Much of Felton's object was gained in the course of this conversation, for Sibbald found a genuine commiseration for the man established in himself, and all thought of divulging his secret utterly extinct. From a logical comprehension of the man's case, though, he was still very far. In casuistry he was no scholar, having ever looked at things directly in the face, and accepted them, without so much as question, for what they seemed. Such a glance naturally made short work of this fog from the Quayside.

"There is little credit in what I have done," laughed Crozier, in a light way. "The question now is what I am going to do."

Felton eyed him quickly, perhaps with momentary alarm.

"Your secret is, of course, safe with me," Sibbald continued; "but, for all that, things can hardly go on as they are. What if my father meets you some day?"

"Intimate friends have not recognised me, and he certainly would not."

"Don't be so sure of that."

"But what is there to suggest it? He supposes me dead; he would never—"

"But he does not suppose you dead. He is prepared at this minute to take any number of oaths that you are alive. He has been searching for you through his lawyer, and you only saw me at Newcastle because I had come to inquire about you."

"And Daniel betrayed me!" exclaimed Felton, in a loud and angry voice. "I can be equal with him. It is not I only who have secrets to be kept, as he shall know nicely. I'll have—"

"Daniel Curle never uttered one word about you," interposed Crozier calmly, "nor I to him. How my father got his notion I have not been able to make out; but he has it very strongly, and I should advise you not to trust to any disguises with him."

The agitation of Brett's features as he gazed at the desolate hills around him was obvious, and it seemed probable that he was to be again plunged into a spiritual agony such as those he had gone through before.

"But he would pity and forgive me if I explained—"

Laughter this time Sibbald could not restrain.

"He pities nobody, and you certainly he will never forgive. If you want to remain unknown, trust me absolutely in this."

"I shall trust you in everything, for, Sibbald, everything of mine is in your trust." Their eyes met. "What *does* she think?"

Crozier confined his reply almost exclusively to an account of Lina's physical state. He admitted that she had been far from well, and that since the occurrence he had not had a chance of talking with her privately. Now he should seek the earliest opportunity, and give her the explanation that he had had.

Throughout the whole of their conversation they had been mounting the steep slope which rose from the cottage of Whinburnhope, and now, as they attained the summit, just as the breeze which was skipping over the hill-tops dashed into their faces, Felton made an involuntary movement of alarm, and his companion, looking up, saw the game-keeper Hislop not half-a-dozen paces before them.

Now, since the establishment of this singular fiddler in the locality, Hislop had naturally concluded that the sole motive for such a man's residence in such a quarter could but be depredation amongst the game. Being of an adventurous spirit, this reinforcement of the enemy had highly gratified the keeper, for collisions with local

poachers had this autumn been scarce. He had in consequence, kept a very vigilant eye upon Whinburnhope and its occupant without arousing the slightest suspicion in the latter. Felton's start, therefore, had not resulted from the consciousness of being confronted by an antagonist, but simply, in his excited state, from being confronted by a human being at all where he had expected to meet only the breezes and the moorfowl. The average man never seeks far for his cause, even should there be appearance of mystery; when obviously there is none, it surely is not reasonable to seek at all. A keeper naturally expects a poacher to look uncomfortable in his presence; ergo, when a suspected character looks uncomfortable in his presence, he is already a poacher. Hislop had only had suspicions before, now he had proof.

It had been Crozier's intention to part company on the summit, but in view of this incident he went on, and Felton by his side. They both just nodded in passing, and received but a supercilious recognition in return.

"I should make friends with that man," observed Sibbald when they had passed, and his companion looked up in surprise. "He already suspects you."

"Suspects me? But I never set eye on him before I came here," stammered Felton.

"Only of poaching. I merely give you my advice. He will do you any injury that he thinks possible. Do you keep any whisky? . . . Then get some in on the first opportunity."

In his nervous condition this hint gave Felton so much alarm that he resolved to turn and propitiate the keeper forthwith. Sibbald acquiesced, and, promising to see him again soon, went on his way.

The extraordinary revelation which this meeting had afforded engrossed Crozier as he returned home. Contempt and commiseration for a being so situated could not but be mingled in his mind, all of which became merged at times in the irresistible humour of the thing.

But as he observed the growing effect of these things upon his father, he felt some scruples as

to his own position, and more than once regretted the rather hasty promise of secrecy that he had given. Now that he could regard the matter more dispassionately, he was wholly unable to resist the conviction that, gloss it how he might, scoundrelism was at the root of his uncle's action. Sibbald, as we have before seen, had never been intangled in any spiritual imbroglio down amongst the sources of all things in heaven and earth. Violent contrasts and problems had never been thrust upon him. The whole of his intellectual activity (if so dignified a term could be properly applied at all to his imaginative vagaries) had been expended in a very positive manner rather as a rational recreation than as a serious course of study from which vital issues were to be evolved. Therefore, though he had read many books, his outlook remained unconsciously dramatic, like that of an intelligent child.

Before this connection with his uncle he had not so much as thought of these things; now he pondered them a good deal.

CHAPTER XI.

A FINGER-POST.

FELTON soon overtook the keeper, for, as a matter of fact, the latter had lingered behind a bit of rising ground to watch the departing figures, and from which he emerged as soon as he saw the fiddler returning alone. He had been informed before of the mysterious intercourse going on between young Crozier and the man, and had not failed to speculate upon it.

"So Mr. Crozier's a friend o' yours," remarked Hislop as the other came up. "Ye'll no be altogether a stranger hereaway, daur say?"

"Oh, he's a guid fellow yon," was the easy answer, given in the broad tone commonly adopted by Felton in character. "But what should make you think that I'm no just a stranger? Ye'll no hae seen me here before, onyway."

"But others have, likely."

"No varry likely," returned Felton, still sustaining the jocular note. "Tell me yen."

"Wattie Faw."

"Then he kens mair nor I do mysel'. I hae worked for the whole o' my life on the Quayside, in Newcassel."

Hislop shattered this statement with a jeering laugh, which re-echoed through the little valley of the Whinburn, and which led Felton to demand what he saw wrong in that.

"Wattie could tell ye nicely, but ye tak' good care to keep out o' the scent o' him."

"But ye're oot there, man. I'll wad Wattie, or onybody else, a pint o' whisky that they ha'na see'd me in the length o' Braiddale before the sceventeenth day of October, in this present year; that's fair, and I'll tak' it ony day, and in ony place, before onybody ye like to choose."

"Then will ye doon to the Brig End at Crawston the night?"

"Sarrtainly."

The man's apparent readiness to comply seemed to check Hislop a little, and as a grouse scud across the vale he shot and missed.

"Then what brought you here?" asked the keeper, as the smoke blew into their faces, and was dispersed.

"Just Mr. Sibbald Crozier." Felton was ignorant of the ill-feeling which existed between the two men. "Dinna ye ken him?"

"Ay, ay, as well as I've a mind to. But I didna ken he'd much to do wi' your trade."

"But he has the book-learning, ye ken. My sartie, did ye ever hear him preach?"

Hislop did not disguise his open disdain for such a poor attempt at fooling him, and was about to turn off, but his companion asked him to come along to the house. Curiosity, or suspicion, at once agreed, so they dropped down to Whinburn-hope together. The keeper lit his pipe in the cottage, and cast a supercilious eye around.

"Look in to us, man, when you are by here.

I'll hae a drap whisky the next time,—the pint I'll win the night, onyway," laughed he. And having taken up his instrument, Felton strummed a rude air on the strings with his thumb, as on a guitar. Such affability, however, was lost on so shrewd an observer as Hislop, and he did not in the least relax. For one thing, he was not quite sure that such a fellow's affability was not impertinence to one of his class. When he had looked well about him, with a reminder of the night's engagement, he went on his way, and Felton stood in the door to ponder the encounter.

What a gamekeeper's suspicions against him might be it was not difficult to guess at, but in this man's disturbed state, suspicions of any kind greatly unnerved him. He was but too well aware that complications of one kind might easily involve complications of another, so he would rather avoid such altogether. Thus it was that he looked heavily after Hislop as the latter turned the corner into the wider valley of Braiddale.

Whether he had calculated upon it or no, it

was inevitable that his neighbours, remote enough though they were, should take an exceptional interest in this new tenant of Whinburnhope. He had, in fact, been a staple topic of conversation at the Brig End Inn almost from the day of his arrival, and it was only as a tribute to the society over which he ruled there that Hislop had trapped the fiddler into so public an appearance.

"I promised you I'd have him doon, Wattie," exclaimed he in triumph as he burst in upon the old mugger meditating alone in a corner of the settle by the inn fire-place, his usual position when not upon the road, or under a dike. It was getting dusk, and the old countryman peered up at the keeper without speaking, merely emitting a puff of grey malodorous smoke from between his lips, his black stump of a pipe gripped by the teeth, bowl downwards. "I canna mak' him oot."

Felton was a godsend to the old rogue, insomuch as he diverted a too exclusive attention to his own peccadilloes amongst the game.

"Ye'll mak' him oot belyve, Mr. Hislop," chuckled he.

"Young Crozier was along to him again the day. . . . Half whisky and lemon, if *you* please, Mrs. Dixon. Ay, ay, snow likely."

And sitting down on a chair which he had dragged up to the fire, Hislop told Faw of his engagement with the fiddler, and they proceeded to discuss the subject of their curiosity with characteristic freedom and volubility.

"What for canna you let Mr. Sibbald alone, onyway?" interposed the landlady sharply as she put down the liquor demanded. "I dinna believe the lad's what you all ca' him."

"Oh, we'll no harm the lad," laughed Hislop. "If he's got into the arms o' the ladies, we'll hae nae chance, Wattie."

With a pout of disdain Mrs. Dixon swept out again, and they heard the door of her room slammed after her.

"You're in the right, Jenniper," said she, with some emphasis to a private visitor, who was sitting

comfortably there in an armchair. "I like that Hislop badly."

"What's his game now?"

"He's aye trying to brew mischief for somebody. He'll no rest till he has yon fiddler thrappled, poor body."

"But that man can look after himself," laughed Jenniper.

"With Mr. Sib to help him, eh? But I canna make out what brings them two together when Crozier's sac particular wi' his folk. But there's inair on 'em," exclaimed the woman, as she heard a loud continuous knocking in the room she had just come from, and went off to attend to it.

"Come away, man!" heard Jenniper in a loud voice, recognisable as Hislop's, greeting, as it seemed, some new arrival amidst a general murmur of approval. "Ay, ay, tune him up. We'll no object to a touch by way o' commencement."

The sounds of the bow drawn over the fiddle strings announced that it was the arrival of Felton they were celebrating. Jenniper drew over towards

the door which had been left ajar, the relative positions of the rooms precluding all fear of her being detected. Her features showed traces of increased animation, as she listened to the confused voices outside, Hislop's continuing pre-eminent amidst the hubbub. It was evident that the fiddler's arrival in the village had immediately drawn together a considerable number of the curious, and a notion of the general challenge which was to be decided could be gathered from their talk. When the hostess returned to her, Jenniper did not disguise her own interest in the proceedings, so they sat with the door still open, in order to gather the drift of what was going on.

It was very soon shown that the mugger's boast, which had savoured so strongly of mysterious importance, was of no worth at all. When boldly confronted by Felton, the man prevaricated a good deal, and ultimately had to admit that he was mistaken, that, in fact, he had never seen him in his life before a certain day, the day on which old Crozier had chivied the lass, which was

an incident known by gossip to all. It was soon apparent that this discomfiture of Faw had made Felton into a hero for the nonce, and as he wore his triumph with jocular magnanimity, good humour was sustained. Hislop alone took no trouble to hide his annoyance, for he was determined from the first that the musician was to be his foe.

It was exactly for every interposition of his voice that Jennifer listened with care. That young Crozier's name was intimately connected with the quarrel she had immediately known, and what the keeper's attitude to him was she had not now to learn. None the less, as his malignant vilification of the Scholar mingled with the noise, her eyes might have been seen to flash, and her lips to quiver. After one vehement protest of surprise at the universal opinion of his friend, Felton said no more upon the point, his policy lying so clearly the other way.

"Your friend is too good for the like of us," Hislop had vociferated in no uncertain tone. "We haena learning enough for such a chiel. Stick to

him and welcome, books an' a'. Let's hae some more whisky." A verdict in which all agreed.

When it was clear that whisky was to win the day, Jenniper's interest relaxed, and she did not stay at the inn much longer. From childhood an intimate of Mrs. Dixon's, her intercourse with her had increased lately, owing to the unalterable prejudice of her other chief friend, Maggie Laidler, against the topic of Bygate. Jenniper had developed of late a propensity to conversation on this subject, and Mrs. Dixon was always willing to humour her in it.

As she hastened homewards beneath the darkly-rolling sky, she dwelt with indignation upon that voice of Hislop's, and with just the slightest shade of anxiety. She would not have admitted the whole thought that such as he could have any power against Crozier, but from the tendency of his expressions, as associated with the fiddler, it was so plain that he was seeking an opportunity to injure Sibbald through him, that she could not avoid the fear of an occasion being given. There

was some little mystery in her own mind hanging round Crozier's intercourse with Felton, so that it was conceivable that annoyance, at any rate, might be caused to the former by the devices of an unscrupulous and malicious spy. By the time she reached home Jenniper had come to the conclusion frankly to see the Scholar about it, so that he might, at least, be aware of what was being said about him.

When so determined, opportunities were not wanting. Curiously, of late days, Jenniper had become very much more familiar with the movements of her neighbour across the valley, and was aware of his regular visits to an outlying bit of his father's territory on the Foulburn, on her side of the water that is.

"Does young Crozier come over to the Foulburn the day, father?" she accordingly asked a morning or two later.

"Ay, ay, hinny."

"Then I'll walk down wi' you, for I want twa three words wi' him."

Since Jenniper had extended her countenance to Adelina, there appeared nothing extraordinary in such a statement, for the daughter had openly confessed at home her repudiation of the popular estimate of the Scholar. So the father just assented in his laconic way.

The two dogs had exchanged a friendly greeting whilst their respective masters were still far apart. In fact, the paths of these latter did not of necessity converge, but the eye of Crozier watched with curiosity for what was to take place. The appearance of *two* figures across there had surprised him, and now that, as he approached, one of them was coming directly towards him, he altered his own course.

“She has been ill,” began Sibbald, to anticipate her announcement.

“It was not about her that I came over to speak to you,” was the matter-of-fact reply, and without any other introduction Jenniper briefly disclosed the suspicions she entertained. Sibbald looked at her with astonishment and something more.

"I didn't think there was anybody could take the trouble to let me know," said he with a grim smile.

"Daur say I shouldna if it had been anybody else but him," and she turned as if to go.

"Stay to let me thank you, Jenniper."

"Oh, that'll do some other time," cried she, already on her way across the bent.

Sibbald summoned his dog, and strode on thoughtfully. It was by no means Hislop that he was thinking of, but purely and simply of the face that he had just seen. It was only quite recently that he had ever looked into a female face, an experience which had affected his attitude to all of them. All other late experiences were insignificant to this one, so he pondered it alone as he went on.

Nor for that morning only. As he sat reading with Adelina before him, he snatched furtive glances at her, and compared her beauty to that of Jenniper, and on the whole in favour of Lina. Jenniper rather suggested that she could take care of herself, that she would not faint and need

caressing upon any possible occasion. Sibbald's awakening sentiment inclined to that need of protection ; the sense of possession would be so much greater. So, although he knew a genuine pleasure in encountering Jenniper, in feeling that she thought occasionally about him, the sensation indirectly took the part of Lina.

In the same way his cousin's illness played a distinct part in these subtle emotions. To see her pale and listless before him aroused his indignation, called out his chivalrous strength. The shock had been a real one to her, and but for his sustaining kindness the consequences might have been grave. It was some time before she could talk of her father ; months before she could entertain a thought of seeing him again. With regard to his daughter, Brett's scheme had been effectual enough. In the single respect that he had calculated upon a resurrection, it was scarcely likely that he would have any future life. Her father, as she had conceived him, was dead to her, and her imagination was not sufficiently strong to call him back.

As the days went on, Sibbald had to broach something of this to Felton himself, for in all their intercourse his one cry was for his girl. He wrote long impassioned appeals to her: pages in extenuation of his apparently heartless device; but they only gained Adelina's copious tears. At length, seeing their effect on her, Crozier simply declined to deliver any more. In face of this, the father's agitation exceeded all bounds, and frantic schemes flitted through his mind.

For one thing, he began to distrust Sibbald's estimate of his father. To Felton's disordered fancy it seemed impossible that any man could be so inhuman as old Crozier was held out to be, and all in respect of a few paltry pounds. More than once was he assailed by the idea of flinging himself upon the farmer's generosity, as he had done upon that of his son, and leaving the consequences to Providence. But the winter advanced, and his resolution still failed him. It was a kindly winter; frost occasionally, but so far the snow had held off. One night in January when

the fiddler was contemplating this course—nay, rather vehemently invoking it in the acute agony familiar to him—he was checked in his audible soliloquy by a knock at the door. It had to be repeated before he went to respond to it. It was the first nocturnal visitor he had had since he had dwelt here, and perhaps a bit of genuine nervousness entered into his disquiet. When at length he threw his door open, as with a movement of abandoned despair, to his astonishment, and also his relief, he discerned the figure of Hislop standing there beneath the stars.

The usual surly aspect of patronage sat on the keeper's face as he silently came in, with perhaps just a little additional suspicion and asperity. His chagrin at the mugger's failure that night at the Brig End had been deeper than the thing seemed to warrant, and it had only deepened ever since. There were appearances enough to sustain rather more than his original suspicion, yet could he obtain nothing upon which to act. Wholly unknown to Felton, two or three nights a week had

he prowled about this remote cottage peering into any cranny he could detect. Passionate prayers and other incongruous utterances had he heard frequently from the lone inmate inside, but so far nothing of an incriminating nature. It was in a fit of angry disgust that on this occasion he had been tempted to announce himself.

"What the *devil* are you doing here?" he fiercely exclaimed, as he looked round, blinking in the light.

"Naething o' the devil's business, I'se warr'nd ye, Mr. Hislop," returned the other angrily. "I hae deen wi' the like o' him this mony a day. But come away and sit ye doon, and I'll tell ye."

Producing a bottle of whisky and a tumbler, Felton put his visitor in the only chair in his possession. As he composed himself, the keeper thought it necessary to explain that he only chanced to be in that quarter at such a time on the look-out for some poachers of whom he had got a sniff.

"And ye thought that I was yen on 'em, nae

doubt. Well, well, I'm no feared to see ye at onytime, notice or no notice."

Hislop hummed, and drank of the whisky that had been poured out for him.

"Perhaps you can tell me a thing," said he, replacing the tumbler, and fixing his eyes upon it. "Is that friend o' yours carrying on wi' Jennifer Curle of Angryhaugh?"

"It's no varry likely," said Felton with a judicial smile.

"Why? Is it the other lass?"

"He has mair sense than to bother his head ower the lasses. It's juist neither one of them nor t'other."

"That'll no do for me. Mair likely it's both."

"Ye're out there, I tell ye. Mr. Crozier is an honourable man—"

"Comes to say his prayers with you, daur say. I like thae fellows badly amang the lasses. Ye've mair chance wi' a trooper."

Felton smiled in spite of himself, and was misunderstood by his companion.

"Na, na, Mr. Hislop, I meant nae offence to

ye. But I gie ye my word of honour that the lad hasna sae much as named a lass to me in the way you speak of. Upon my faith, I dinna think he has any thought o' sicna maitter."

"Then what for does he meet 'em, and gan walks wi' 'em ower the moors?"

"Ye maun be mistaken. He'll be kind to yon lass at Bygate o' course, for she's kin to him, and left without a home, they tell me."

"He may do what he's a mind with the like o' her, but ye may tell him, as I've told him before, that if he does any mischief to Jenniper Curle, by gum, I'll shoot him."

"And quite right, tee," asserted Felton. "I'd dee it mysel' if I was a shooting man. But I tell ye there is nae fear o' him. I'd rather trust him wi' the lasses than his father, a'd (old) as he is."

"How come you to ken his father?" said the keeper suspiciously.

"Oh, yen picks up gossip, ye ken. There are strange tales o' the aa'd fellow aboot the hills. But I dinna think he's sae bad as they mak' oot."

"He's a surly old deevil ony way. Did you ever speak to him?"

"Oh no; he'd hae nae words for the like o' huz."

"But you ought to gan and fiddle to him," said Hislop in a jocose tone. "He'd varry likely give you a crown, or a broken yen, which 'ud do the same. I mind him yence doon at the Brig End have a fight wi' a tinker, and when he had knocked him a' to a dummy, he just gave the lad a plaster o' whisky and half a sovereign to put in his pouch."

"Ay, ay," said Felton, with a display of some interest. "Then he's no just a deevil a'thegither."

"You shall try him," cried the other, seeming to have caught an idea, whereat the fiddler gave an involuntary start, which he had to disguise as he was best able. But the movement had not escaped his companion, constantly on the alert for the smallest clue. Encouraged by such an unexpected glimpse, Hislop ran along the vein which he had struck, noting minutely every effect

upon the other, who, though fully alarmed into caution, was physically incapable of hiding any manifestation of feeling. The keeper could not but gather that it would be at anyrate unpleasant to Felton to encounter old Crozier; therefore was it an object to be attained. Now that the thought struck him, it was not at all impossible that some mischief between father and son at least might be lurking in it, for gossip did not report the household footing at Bygate as excessively cordial. At anyrate, it was the first and only opening he had got for all his pains through the winter, and after more whisky he soon launched with it into the night.

At first Felton was in considerable alarm, but after a fuller survey of the prospect he decided to confront it as he might. The suspicion, recently admitted, that Sibbald must have exaggerated his father's severity, asserted itself again, and he tried ultimately to convince himself that the maliciously meant action of Hislop might prove the means of resolving his own indecision.

The keeper went down until he struck the road, and then as he walked along under the frosty sky, starlit but without moon, he trifled in a characteristic way with the thought which the fiddler's whisky had imparted. If old Crozier happened to be in a suitable mood at the moment, a meeting between him and this fiddler would make admirable sport.

It was familiar matter of comment that the old master of Bygate was uncommonly active these days. Never a week went by without his making one or more journeys to Newcastle, it was reported, so that Hislop had not long to wait for a convenient encounter. It was the following afternoon that he met the farmer walking his horse up the steep brae known as Mount Hooly. Civilities were scarcely ever wasted by Crozier upon any of his neighbours, so he grunted some return to the keeper's greeting, and kept on his way. Hislop walked on by the horse, nothing daunted, and showed his determination to extort a word at any hazard. Old Crozier looked down at his assail-

ant with angry astonishment. As was habitual with him now, his thoughts ran in a stormy channel, and he was more than ordinarily likely to resent any unsought interruption.

"I ken naething o' the fellow, I tell ye," he repeated in an angry tone to Hislop's persistent inquiry.

"But does he ken onything o' you? He hangs a tarr'ble deal about Bygate. He is either poaching on your land or on mine, and it's no on mine, I warrant you."

"What's yon you are saying? Who is poaching on my land? What are you talking about, man?"

"Yon fiddler that is living at Whinburnhope, out of a' bodies' eyes, and that nobody kens onything about, unless it's your ain son, likely."

The old man fixed his eyes with an eager, if fierce, expression of inquiry upon the keeper, to the infinite satisfaction of the latter. His cunning, then, had not wholly deceived him.

"How should my son ken onything about the man?"

"They are aye reading books and saying their prayers together."

"Dinna ye play the fool wi' me, my man, for ye'll no find it answer. Just tell me your tale in a plain way, if ye hae a tale."

"Well, were ye no aware o' this fiddler fellow they call Felton setting up his shop at Whinburn-hope? He has been there twa-three months already; and if I may tell you my ain opinion, I just believe that he's naething but a game-dealer for some o' thae chiels in Newcassel. He has just got ower your son fine wi' his verses, his prayer-books, and such like, and I doubt he wadna see the hare if the fellow nabbed yen under his varry nose."

"Wha ever got ower a son o' mine wi' a prayer-book, I'd like to ken?" roared the old fellow in a fury. "Ye hae just some o' your ain snick-drawing dodges on hand the noo, and ye're trying them in the wrong quarter, I can assure ye. I can just tell ye this, *Mr. Hislop*, as I ken ye like weel to be called by the like of us, that if I dinna find

a tarr'ble big lump o' truth in these lies o' yours,
you shall answer for it wi' your banes."

Therewith Mr. Crozier nudged his horse, and left the keeper to vent his wrath in a torrent of futile indignation.

Still, as Hislop shrewdly suspected, his coloured disclosures had not been without effect upon his choleric neighbour. As the farmer trotted over the short green track worn amongst the grey bent, his eye was set in resolute anger, rather than in any determinate reflection. If there were a definite thread at all to it, no doubt it took the form of indignation, at Sibbald's even giving any occasion for popular gossip such as this, by foregathering with a blackguard. This almost obscured for the present the pregnant mystery in which the fiddler seemed involved, and it was with it as a first charge that the old man rode on to Bygate.

Adelina, who was talking to Sibbald in the yard, fled at the sound of the horse's step, so that the young man was there alone to receive his father.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

THE prospect of being foiled in a pursuit upon which he had risked so much determination had rankled in old Crozier's mind, and intensified immeasurably the savage resentment he had felt against those who had imposed upon him. So bitter did he at length become, and so utterly hopeless the search under his own hands, that he flung his secret to the police, and with characteristic vehemence bade them unearth the scoundrel, he, of course, undertaking to defray all expense. To this the old man only received considerate, almost benevolent, advice; upon his contesting the matter with surprise, he was met with scarcely disguised derision, and he went.

Nothing else was required to turn his invincible fancy into an idea fixed and supreme. It mattered

not that all the blockhead earth, and, if it cared to, all the blockhead sky, should proclaim Collingwood Brett deceased, and Maxwell Crozier insane; he, Maxwell Crozier, knew the said Brett to be alive by virtue of his inner consciousness, and knew furthermore that he would have his clutch upon the man, or perish in the attempt.

In observing the effect of this through the winter weeks that had passed, scruples had assailed Sibbald. The irritability of his father became intolerable, and, what was more, his business capacity lapsed. The old man flitted to and fro, utterly regardless of expense; he also dispatched Sibbald to and fro. With the knowledge he possessed, the irritation from such a course was little less to the son than to his father, and the farmer's perplexity increased. Upon one or two occasions the farmer's treatment of Adelina had become brutal, in his son's absence, even blows being used, so that the Scholar was being rapidly carried on to a position which might be called critical. One glimpse of the old man on his re-

turn to-day was enough to show that things were, if that were possible, a trifle worse than usual.

Disregarding even the meal which was generally his first consideration, the farmer bade Sibbald accompany him to the parlour, which the latter did with a resolute deportment.

"Have you got a prayer-book?" demanded the elder, when he had shut the door.

Sibbald admitted that he had not.

"Have you ever said ony prayers wi' a gangrel fiddler that has come to Whinburnhope?"

"I have not. It is not a common occupation of mine."

There was such an exasperating calm and dignity in the bearing of the young man as he stood arraigned there, that his father could scarcely trust himself to glance at him, even in his anger.

"Then *that* is a' damned lies, as I expected. Is there a fiddler at a' come to Whinburnhope?"

"Ay, ay, a half-mad fellow, that wanted to live in the hills instead of on the Quayside."

The heroic price of this piece of constancy was not apparent on Sibbald's features, but as he came

in he had resolved not to sustain it. Brett had for a few minutes been doomed.

"And what hae you had to do wi' him?"

"I have had some cracks with him, and lent him some books."

In a moment the old man's eagle eye was fixed full upon the figure before him, but could detect no sign of blenching.

"He wouldna dare to do it . . . by my varry door cheek. . . . But where do you say he came frae? . . . Ay, ay, the Quayside. Well, I'll away doon to him."

There was something pathetic to Sibbald's ears in the desperate resignation of the last expression, just a faint glimpse of distrust in a vain pursuit, without the ability to accept a failure, of which no word of his father's had hitherto afforded the faintest hint. But in a moment the young man's sympathies fled to that agonised wretch to whom he seemed to have promised a kind of protection, and here was the first opportunity presented of putting it into action. Nor would he fail him. He had walked to the window, and was looking out.

"We'll have the snow likely," remarked he.
"Shall I get the sheep across from the Foulburn?"

The old man had been plunged in a deep reverie, and looked across at him as if addressed in a foreign tongue.

"Did Daniel Curle answer yon letter?"

"Nothing came this morning."

"I'll feed, and then I'll gan. . . . The sheep? I ken naething about the sheep. Dae onything you like wi' 'em."

Sibbald's suggestion was, of course, but an excuse for getting to his horse. Saying that he should ride over to the Foulburn, he went off as his father sat down to the table which had been prepared for him. When he was beyond the brae which he knew would hide him from the house, the young man tried the mettle of his steed. Gaining the smooth turf of the roadside, he never paused in his scamper until he turned in at the mouth of the narrow Whinburn. The door was open, and Felton hurried forth at the sound of the hoofs.

"My father will be here in half an hour. He

doesn't know you, but he is coming to see. Do as you think best."

Felton threw out some inquiry.

"I don't know who," cried Sibbald, and was gone, for it was indispensable that he should reach another defile across the valley before the old man gained a certain point in the road. Looking down the vale as he crossed, no traveller was in sight. By those sinuous creases down which the burns ran, Sibbald reached the Foulburn with an easy conscience, and with no little curiosity as to the outcome of the visit which he had announced.

The news had put Felton into a fever, and he had no difficulty in tracing the crisis which was impending to that nocturnal visit from the keeper. For about five minutes he was in an inferno of unrest and indecision, swayed mainly by a fierce impulse to fly. It passed, and he resolved that the circumstances of the interview itself should regulate his further action. He set about some slight preparations which should give the appearance of the utter want of such, and then endeavoured

to put his mind in equal readiness. Every few minutes he went down to the stream for an unnecessary pail of water, if perchance he might be found by his visitor in that occupation. When he had poured it away behind the house he would go inside, and perhaps stare once more at his own features in the little looking-glass hanging on the wall, or even cast only a blank glance round the half furnished cottage.

There was no special haste in old Crozier's movements. When he was actually placed in front of his food he ate voraciously, scarcely casting an eye around him. Isabel went on with her usual work without regarding him. When at length he rose from the table, the lowing of cows, which had been for some time audible, seemed to gain his ear.

"Where's yon lass?" he demanded, kicking and overturning behind him the heavy chair which had been prevented by a joint in the stones from obeying his first milder movement. "Why has she no gone to the byre?"

"She'll no be twa-three minutes," said Isabel in defence, just as Adelina's steps were in fact

heard coming from the staircase. She shot through the room and was gone, before so much as a word from her uncle could intercept her. As she disappeared, the relentless features seemed to relax into a grim smile as though from some savage sense of humour. Then the old man went into the other room for the inevitable whisky.

The blue-grey sky and sombre hills beneath it were no inappropriate setting for that figure which a few minutes later was issuing from Bygate. A north-east wind was blowing briskly over the fells and just swaying the fir-trees, but it was scarcely enough to ruffle the grisly beard which fringed the hard features of the rider. When he reached the road below, he broke into a trot.

Just by the blasted ash-tree where the Whinburn ran into the Braid water, Mr. Crozier forded the stream. The heavily clouded sky made twilight seem already imminent, but upon such an occasion it is probable that Felton's eye could have pierced the midnight darkness. As the rider actually came in sight, the man found all his resolu-

tion desert him, and again he was assailed by a wild impulse to flight. Again it passed, and once again he took his bucket down to the water.

He regulated his movements by those of the approaching horseman, so that by the time the latter was drawing up to the doorway, Felton also was coming to the same point. He planted his bucket down, allowing the handle to fall with a clatter, which resounded in the intense silence of the place, and then looked with a glance of inquisitive effrontery at his visitor.

"Ye'll hae lost your road likely," said he with the most absolute assurance.

"I kent my road hereaway before you were born," almost snarled the disappointed old farmer after a long and ardent scrutiny.

"Then I beg your pardon. I thought ye were aiblins a stranger here."

"It's no the road, but your ain sel' that I ha' come to ha' a glint o'. They tell me that you hae been poaching on the lands o' Bygate."

"Then they hae telled ye a great muckle big

lee just entirely a' thegither. Are ye then Mr. Crozier, the father o' Mr. Sibbald, the best gentleman that you could meet in ony country? He'll no hae sarved me sicna pliskie, I'se warr'nd ye. What could I hae to gain by poaching on the land of them as have been the best o' friends to me? That's no my gate ony way."

The old farmer seemed to be genuinely puzzled, by being so completely thrown off the ground which he had of late so exclusively occupied.

"How can ye live here without poaching?" he demanded at last in a stern but comparatively conciliatory tone.

"Oh, nicely, I hae my aa'd *Ferliekyte* away on a nail there," said Felton with a careless toss of his head towards the cottage. "May I mak' bold to ask ye come ben? I hae a nice drappie o' gude stuff on a by-shelf, ye ken. It'll keep oot the snaw, for we'se hae it afore lang."

"Ay, ay, man, I'll taste your whisky, daur say," said the old man, as he flung himself from his horse in abandonment to his social instincts and

momentary victory over the clouds which had oppressed him so long.

In the dim light and the incongruous surroundings, Brett's disguise had prevailed completely against even this man's consuming suspicion, and in view of the conviviality offered, old Crozier's human nature reasserted itself once more with characteristic fervour. The sudden removal of the incubus under which he had travelled here seemed to liberate the springs of joviality which had appeared so long broken in him. The remote situation and the utterly strange aspect of the fiddler immediately promoted the hilarious suggestion by still more effectually dispelling the familiar sources of oppression. In familiar surroundings such a fit could hardly now have seized him, so ingrained were they with ferocious schemes and hopes. Here he found a moment's unexpected breath.

Trembling from head to foot at the extraordinary task imposed upon him, Felton led the way into the cottage, giving his visitor the only chair of the establishment, and turning up the zinc bucket he

had been using in readiness for himself. Then he attended to the fire, putting on both coal and peat, and sending a cheerful glow through the place, which had before been hidden in twilight gloom. Having placed the kettle on the bars and the bottle and tumblers on the table, he sat down on his own improvised seat.

"Come, man, I'll hae a drap cold forst," said old Crozier, whereat the other laughed jovially, and bade him help himsel'.

No doubt ample hair and a smooth face had effectually transformed the dignified bald pate and patriarchal beard which had characterised the former city councillor of Newcastle, but a less complete disguise would have served the peasant brother-in-law on this occasion. Having once admitted the social virtues, the old farmer seemed intent upon hurling far from him every consideration that could possibly recall the curse of recent days. For one brief hour at least was he determined to unbend and to open his arms to something of the mad frolic that life had in former years contained for him. Although never an habitual toper, strange tales were

in the dale (and indeed in several adjoining ones) of “aa’d Crozier’s” prowess and uncontrollable sport. In Bellingham, Rothbury, and Wooler, even in Hexham, Haltwhistle, and Carlisle, was his name formerly known. But there had been from the first too great a spice of devilry in his pranks even for a robust and not over-fastidious population. He had always been just a little bit feared, for nobody knew where he was going to stop. Such considerations, however, in no way afflicted fiddler Felton to-night.

The sturdy conviviality of Crozier was so apparent, his own security so assured, that the man himself felt the full glow of the social contact. In quick response to his visitor’s leading, he expanded on the subject of his wanderings these winter months, of the experiences he had met with, of the sums he had obtained. The name of every place or farm seemed to awaken some long lost memory of the farmer’s, some jovial tale, some outburst of indignant wrath. In due course the fiddle itself was invoked, and old Crozier’s voice was heard roaring in the chorus of some convivial song.

For some time, it is true, Felton kept a vigilant eye upon his companion, aware no doubt that what was being accomplished by himself might just as possibly be accomplished by another. What if he should awake and find that it was *he* who had been the dupe in the transaction? But such a thought could not long have a place in him. Crozier's sincerity was too transparent; the sustaining, nay, the attempting, any assumed part so supremely impossible, that at length Felton, too, abandoned himself to such relaxation as had for many a year been beyond him.

When Sibbald had brought the sheep from the Foulburn to the hill nearer home, it was already dusk, and dancing flakes of snow began to hover in the twilight. He went in to ask if his father had returned. Adelina, who was with Isabel, noticed something in her cousin's face as he received the negative, and she followed him up-stairs. Just inside his room, where it was all but dark, she darted forward and seized his hand.

"Has—has he gone *there*, Sibbald? Dear Sibbald, do tell me."

There was nervousness in her tone, but at the same time an unaccustomed energy.

"Never mind, Lina. Don't trouble your head about him," replied the young man in a careless way.

"But I am sure he has gone. . . . He may kill him,—he would—"

Curiously enough, Lina interpreted exactly fears which had affected Crozier himself, for if Felton had taken his advice and fled, the old man must by now have returned home. Adelina's speech had been interrupted by Sibbald's arm twining around her.

"Dinna be afraid, my wee lassie," said he, in a tender, playful way. "I'll ride away and see."

"But the snow is beginning, you—you may be buried and lost." A loud laugh rent the silence of the house.

"Would that be such a terrible loss to you?" whispered Sibbald, with his lips not far from her ear.

"Oh, don't ask me such a thing! I could endure anything—yes, anything—but that."

"Then I'll promise not to be lost if you really wish it; but for that I have no doubt this terrific storm would have smothered me."

She pouted something, but Sibbald smothered *her* in a momentary embrace, and fled down the staircase.

Once on the road Crozier felt the genuine danger of the situation, and urged his horse accordingly. Just outside Whinburnhope he could discern his father's horse fastened by the doorway, and as he approached, a dark, evidently startled, figure leapt from the horse's side, and fled into the obscurity up the valley. This astonished Crozier, especially when he was near enough to hear the mirth which was proceeding in the cottage. He rode quickly forward, but could get no second glimpse of the eavesdropper.

When he came back to the door, Sibbald listened, and could distinctly recognise his father's voice roaring out the chorus of "Do ye ken John Peel?" to the strains of the fiddle. So astoundingly incongruous was it with all the previous current of his thoughts that the young man stood in momentary doubt of his own senses. When it could be resisted no longer, he raised his hand with the intention of knocking at the door, but withdrew it, and turned his horse away. A

sudden reflection had shown him the danger of intruding on his father's jollity, both on his own behalf and that of Felton. As he departed, the patient horse which he was leaving neighed to its companion. From the bottom of the bank he saw the door of the cottage opened, and the inside light revealed. It closed again, and he rode on his way to Bygate.

"He's aye prowling about us, ye ken," said Felton to his companion, who had expressed impatience at the interruption.

"My sartie, but I'll break his neck for him if I catch him on my track. Come away, man!"

Felton was more readily affected by such reckless conviviality than his hardened visitor, and he soon advanced to a perilous degree of loquacity. His dialect became uncertain, whole sentences being interspersed (had the old farmer been critical enough to observe it) in the most accurate of the Queen's English. But Crozier seemed regardless of that, as of everything else about him, except whisky and songs, and so continued until ten

o'clock. Exactly at that hour, by infallible instinct it might have appeared, he took out his watch, and at the same moment rose to his feet, announcing in the most quiet and determined manner that he maun ride. Felton looked at him stupidly, mumbling regrets.

"Ay, ay, anither night, daur say," said the old man quite collectedly. "I had nae notion ye'd been sicna yen. But I'se pay for the whisky, ony way."

Taking out an old bag purse, he flung two half-crowns to the table.

"I'll no hear of it," asserted the fiddler stoutly. "Your company, my dear sir, is—is—we are friends I hope."

"Ha'd away, and dinna mak' a fool o' yoursel'," said Crozier, impatiently flinging open the door, and admitting a whirl of snow, which fell in spots of wet on the stone floor, at sight of which the old man gave a whistle.

"Davie, man,—ay, ay, poor fallow," he went on, liberating the horse and brushing off with his hand the snow in which the animal was enveloped, "we'll be away heame, man."

Felton came forward with a cloth, with which he insisted upon rubbing the saddle, until the old man took it from him, and did it effectually.

"Take care o' yoursel', Mr. Crozier; ye're het, ye ken. Here, man, have a coat to cover you. It snows tarr'ble hard. I insist—I b-beg ye-you. I'll no—on no account whatever be the death o' ye."

"Ay, daur say I wull," said the old man after he had mounted, snatching the proffered coat from the hands of the fiddler, and flinging it over his shoulders. When he had secured it with one button beneath his chin, he turned his horse to the brae, and bursting suddenly and unexpectedly into the chorus of "The Canty Fiddler," fronted the night with that refrain upon his lips.

When the sound was no longer audible, a wild demoniac yell of glee echoed round the mountains, and died away amidst the whispers of the snow. Then Felton slammed his door in the face of the churlish night.

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